

## **sTodpa Language of Lahul - Verbs and Tenses**

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sTod, literally ‘Up,’ denotes the upper part of the valley of Bhaga, a tributary of river Chandrabhaga, in Lahul, Himachal Pradesh. Its inhabitants as such are known as sTodpa, belonging to the upper region, and their language also is known as ‘sTodpa.’

Below are some important features of the language.

- i.** In sTodpa language verbs don’t change with the change of tenses, persons and gender.
- ii.** There are number of auxiliaries which fulfill the requirement of change of verbs in the sentences.
- iii.** There are three tenses like in any other language. But further division of the tenses into smaller divisions is done not like in the advanced and the other languages. Here the principles are different viz. the view from the speaker whether the action is taking place in view of the speaker or behind or beyond the view.

### **A. Verbs and Tenses**

**i.** In the language of sTodpa verb is a disyllabic word consisting of a monosyllabic meaningful verbal root and an additive particle *če* or *še*. In this form it is a verbal noun. Verbs mostly end with *če*.

Ex. *sdad-če* = to sit. *čhoñ-če* = to jump. *šes-še* = to know.

सुदचे | खोणचे | शेषशे

**ii.** When a verb is used in the sentence no change takes place in the verb due to change in tenses, gender and number.

Ex: a. Present tense, Feminine and Masculine: Singular

*ña čha- 'a yod.* = I (F/M) go/ am going.

*khyod čha-rug.* = Thou (F/M) goest/is going.

*kho čha-rug* = She/He goes/ is going.

*bo-mo čha-rug.* = Girl or woman goes/is going.

*bu-tsa čha-rug.* = Boy or man goes/is going.

b. Present tense, Feminine and Masculine: Plural

*ña-ža čha 'a yod.* = We go/are going.

*khyo-ža čha-rug* = You go/are going.

*kho-ba čha-rug.* = They go/are going

*bo-mo – 'un čha-rug.* = Girls or Women go/are going

*bu-tsa- 'un čha-rug.* = Boys or men go/are going.

ང་ཀ་ལ་ཡོད།། ཁྱོད་ཀ་རུག།། ཁོ་ཀ་རུག།། བོ་མོ་ཀ་རུག།། ལུ་ཙ་ཀ་རུག།།

ང་ཞ་ཀ་ལ་ཡོད།། ཁྱོ་ཞ་ཀ་རུག།། ཁོ་བ་ཀ་རུག།། བོ་མོ་ལུན་ཀ་རུག།། ལུ་ཙ་ལུན་

ཀ་རུག།།

Above are given examples of the verb *čha-če* = to go, in two parts a. and b, both in the present tense, first part in the singular and other in plural form, covering the two genders and the three persons. In all the cases *čha*, the root of the verb, remains unchanged.

Exceptionally the verbs *čha-če* = to go, and *bčo--če* = to do have their past forms. They function as verbs and the word *soñ*, the past form of *čha-če* also functions as auxiliary.

**Present**

**Past**

*čha-če* = to go.     *soñ, bud*

*bčo--če* = to do     *bčos*

**B. Tenses:** The three tenses – Past, Present and Future, as is present in all the languages, is followed in sTodpa as it is. But there is difference from that of the other languages in the method of division of these tenses into further smaller divisions. One such factor is the ‘view of the action taking place from the point of the speaker’: whether the action is taking place in view of the speaker or it is behind the scene. This last case is further divided into two. Another factor is the knowledge of the speaker about the action.

**1. Present Tense: i.** In the present form the present indicative and the continuous are exhibited by the same expression. Below we give examples of sentences for all the three persons existing in various forms in the present tense.

Verb: *čha-če* = to go.

**Singular**

1. *na čha- ‘a yod.*  
= I go./ I am going.

2. *khyod čha-rug.*  
= Thou goest.

3. 1. (Visible) *kho čha-rug.*  
=He goes./ He is going.

3.2. (Invisible) *kho čha- ‘a  
-rag* = He goes./He is going.

3.3. *kho čha- ‘a yod-če rag*  
- =(Invisible, indefinite)  
He goes./He is going.

**Plural**

*na-ža čha- ‘a yod*  
=We go./ We are going.

*khyo-ža čha-rug.*  
= You go./You are going.

*kho-ba čha-rug.*  
= They go/ They are going.

*kho-ba čha- ‘a rag.*  
= They go./They are going.

*kho-ba čha- ‘a yod-če rag.*  
= They go./They are going.

ང་ཚེ་ལོང། ང་ཚེ་ལོང། ཁྱོད་ཚེ་ལོང། ཁྱོད་ཚེ་ལོང།

ཁོ་ཚེ་ལོང། ཁོ་ཚེ་ལོང། ཁོ་ཚེ་ལོང། ཁོ་ཚེ་ལོང།

ཁོ་ཚེ་ལོང་ཅི་ལོང། ཁོ་ཚེ་ལོང་ཅི་ལོང།

Here we observe that:

- i. the auxiliaries don't change with the change of person.
- ii. In the first and the second persons there is only one form in the present tense. All actions take place in view of the speaker.
- iii. In the case of the third person there are three forms. In the first case the action takes place in view of the speaker. In second case the action takes place behind the scene but is in the knowledge of the speaker. In the third case the speaker knows that the action is taking place but it is more veiled. We can translate the phrase as: I feel, it appears to me, I understand, etc. that he is going.

Here is given example of verb 'bri-čē = to write, in different forms of present continuous: *kho 'bri-rug.* = He writes or is writing. *kho 'bri-'en 'dug.* = He has been writing. *kho 'bri 'bri-'a-'dug.* = He has been writing continuously. *kho 'bri-'en bčo-rug.* = He is writing (intermittently). *kho bri-'en bčo-rug, sil-len bčo-rug.* = He is writing and then reading, (doing alternately). *kho 'bri-'en 'bri-'en sil-'ug.* = He is reading, while writing. (He is doing both the acts together).

ཁོ་འབྲི་རུག།

ཁོ་འབྲི་འཛ་འདུག།

ཁོ་འབྲི་འབྲི་འཛ་འདུག།

ཁོ་འབྲི་འཛ་བཅོ་རུག།

ཁོ་འབྲི་འཛ་བཅོ་རུག།

མིལ་འཛ་བཅོ་རུག།

ཁོ་འབྲི་འཛ་འབྲི་འཛ་མིལ་རུག།

**2. Past Tense:** In the simple past tense the auxiliary *ben*, *pen* and *ten* are joined with the stem verb in the case of first person. In the case of second and third persons the word *soñ*, past form of the verb *čha-čē*, is used as an auxiliary or some other auxiliaries, like *pen*.

In the Past Tense there are two forms.

- i. Simple Past and      ii. Past Continuous.

**i. Simple Past:** This denotes an accomplished action

Verb: *čha-če* = to go.

**Singular**

**Plural**

1. *ŋa soñ ben.* = I went.

*ŋa-ža soñ-ben.* = We went.

2. *khyod bud-soñ.* = Thou went.

*khyo-ža bud-soñ.* = You went.

3. *kho bud-soñ.* = He went.

*kho-ba bud-soñ.* = They went.

ང་སོང་བེན། ང་ཞ་སོང་བེན། ཁྱོད་བུད་སོང་། ཁྱོད་ཞ་བུད་སོང་། ཁོ་བུད་

སོང་། ཁོ་བ་བུད་སོང་།

Here there is only one form for each person. In the first person the verb is in the form of past tense and the auxiliary is also in the same form. In the second and third persons another form *bud* of the verb *čha-če* has been used and the verb *soñ* in the past form functions as auxiliary.

**ii. Past Continuous:**

**Singular**

**Plural**

1. *ŋa čha- 'a yod-ten.*

*ŋa-ža čha- 'a yod-ten.* =

I was going.

We were going.

2.1. *khyod čha rug-pen.*

*khyo-ža čha-rug-pen.*

= Thou was going.

= You were going.

2.2. *khyod čha- 'a rag-pen.*

*khyo-ža čha- 'a rag-pen.*

= Thou was going.

= You were going.

2.3. *khyod čha- 'a yod-če rag-pen.*

*khyo-ža čha- 'a yod-če rag-pen.*

3.1. *kho čha- rug-pen.*

*kho-ba čha-rug-pen.* = .

He was going

= They were going.

3.2. *kho čha- 'a rag-pen.*

He was going.

3.3. *kho čha- 'a yod-če*

*rag-pen.* =He was going.

*kho-ba čha- 'a rag-pen.*

= They were going.

*kho-ba čha- 'a yod-če rag-pen.*

= They were going.

Here in the past tense the division in the visible and invisible actions and further the invisible into confident and semi-confident is seen in the second and third person.

ང་ཚེ་ཡོད་ཏེ། ང་ཞེ་ཚེ་ཡོད་ཏེ། ཁྱོད་ཚེ་སྲུག་ཟེ། ཁྱོ་ཞེ་ཚེ་སྲུག་ཟེ།

ཁྱོད་ཚེ་འ་སྲུག་ཟེ། ཁྱོ་ཞེ་ཚེ་འ་སྲུག་ཟེ། ཁོ་ཚེ་སྲུག་ཟེ། ཁོ་བེ་ཚེ་སྲུག་ཟེ།

ཁོ་ཚེ་འ་སྲུག་ཟེ། ཁོ་བེ་ཚེ་འ་སྲུག་ཟེ། ཁོ་ཚེ་ཡོད་ཅེ་སྲུག་ཟེ། ཁོ་བེ་ཚེ་འ་

ཡོད་ཅེ་སྲུག་ཟེ།

Here, from the above example, we take the first sentences of the three persons.

1. *na čha- 'a yod-ten.*
2. *khyod čha rug-pen.*
3. *kho čha- rug-pen.*

We observe that the three sentences end with the words : –ten, -pen and –pen, the signs of past tense. If we remove these, the remaining whole are the same as we have seen in the Present Tense.

**3. Future Tense.** In the future tense there is only one form of simple future. The auxiliaries commonly used is ‘*an*. Thus joining the particle ‘*an* with the verb *čha-če* we get the word *čhen*. It can be

joined with any other verb, person or number for future tense. Thus *ña/khyod/kho/ ña-zha/khyo-zha/kho-ba čhen.* = I/thou/he/we/you/they will go.

ང་ཁྱོད་ཁོ་ ར་ལ་ཁྱོ་ལ་ཁོ་བ་ཆེན།།

Some more examples: *bten* = will give. *lto-'an* = will see. *rtsem-men* = will sew. *sil-len* = will read. *śes-sen* = will know. *ña-že bcho-'an.* = We will do. *tu-'u mi-khrod la gtor čhen.* = Child may get lost in the crowd.

བདེན།། ལྷོ་འིན།། རྩམ་མིན།། སིལ་ལིན།། རྗེས་མིན།། ང་ཞེ་བཅོ་འིན།།

ཏུ་ལུ་མི་ཁྱོད་ལ་བདོར་ཆེན།།

4. Below we give some other functions of verbs.

i. Verbs, Transitive and Intransitive:

Verbs are different in the transitive and intransitive forms. Ex:

**Transitive**

- bkar-če.* = To obstruct.
- skañ-če.* = to fill.
- stug-če.* = To burn.
- spir-če.* = To disperse.
- rtsod-če.* = To cook.

**Intransitive**

- 'khar-če.* = To get obstructed.
- khañ-če.* = To get filled up.
- sdug-če.* = To get burned,
- bir-če.* = To get dispersed,
- tshos-še* = To get ripened.

བཀར་ཅེ། སྐར་ཅེ། ལྷུ་གཅེ། སྦྱིར་ཅེ། ལྷོ་དེ།། ལས་ར་ཅེ། ཁང་ཅེ། ལྷུ་གཅེ།

བིར་ཅེ། རྗེས་ཤེ།

*ne kya-pha la nas skan ben.* = I filled the sack with barley. *kho-'e men-tog spir-dog.* = He has dispersed (to press the dry flower to separate seed from leaves) the flower.

ང་ཀྱམ་ཕམ་ལ་ནས་སྐང་བཟུང་། ཁོ་འེ་མེན་དོག་སྲིར་དོག།

**Intransitive:** *nas-si kya-pha khañ soñ.* = The sack has become filled with barley. *men-tog bir dog.* = The flower has scattered.

ནས་སི་ཀྱམ་ཕམ་ཁང་སོང་། མེན་དོག་བིར་དོག།

**ii. Causative:** The following are verbs joined with some other verbs. In this manner they show change in their form.

*grub-če* = To be finished.

*'grub-če btañ-če.* = To let finish.

*'grub čha-če btañ-če.* = To let to be finished.

*khañ čha-če* = To get filled up.

*khañ-če btañ-če.* = To let fill up.

*khañ čha-če btañ-če.* = To let to be filled up.

འགྲུབ་ཅི། འགྲུབ་ཅི་བཏང་ཅི། འགྲུབ་ཆ་ཅི་བཏང་ཅི།

ཁང་ཆ་ཅི། ཁང་ཅི་བཏང་ཅི། ཁང་ཆ་ཅི་བཏང་ཅི།

**iii.** Some verbs function both as primary and secondary verb to strengthen the function of the main verb. Some of these are: *btañ če.* = To give. *bor-če.* = To put, keep, leave. *bčo-če.* = To make, to do. *čha-če* = To go. *tshar-če* = To finish. *rgyab-če* = To hit.

Example: *btañ btañ-če.* = To give away. *btañ bor-če.* = To give away. *bor btañ-če.* = To leave off. *btañ-če btañ bor-če.* = To let the other give away.

བཏང་བཏང་ཅི། བཏང་ཐོར་ཅི། ཐོར་བཏང་ཅི། བཏང་ཅི་བཏང་ཐོར་ཅི།



iv. When a verb is repeated and the particle 'e is placed between the two it becomes emphatic. *zer- 'e zer.* = You must say. *bčos- 'e bčos* = You must do. *soñ-ñe soñ.* = You must go. *sdod-te sdod.* = You must stay. (You, subject, in the sentence is understood.).

ཟེར་འེ་ཟེར།། བཙོས་འེ་བཙོས།། སོང་ཏེ་སོང།། ལྷོད་ཏེ་ལྷོད།།

v. A verb functioning with its particle has limited functions. Here it is not pure verb but carries more or different meaning. Below are given examples of use of verbs with and without additives. *čhu 'khol-lug.* = Water is boiling. *čhu 'khol-čē 'dug.* = Water-boiling-is. Water is about to boil. *rdo- 'a 'gril-lug.* = Stone is falling. *rdo- 'a 'gril-čē 'dug.* = Stone-falling-is. The stone is about to fall (is in unstable position.). *da-lo dgun-ka grañ-mo mañ-po yoñ-čē 'dug.* = This year-winter-cold-much-come-may-is. It appears that this year winter will be severer. *zam-pa čhu 'i si khyer-čē 'dug.* = Bridge-water-by-by-carry-may-is. The bridge is likely to be carried away by water, i.e. the river.

ཚུ་འཁོལ་ཅེ་འདུག།། རོ་འ་འགྲིལ་ཅེ་འདུག།། ད་ལོ་དགུན་ལ་གང་མོ་མང་ལོ་

ཡོང་ཅེ་འདུག།། ཟམ་པ་ཚུ་འེ་སི་ལྷོད་ཅེ་འདུག།།

vi. Often two verbs function in combination in their primary form. *kho yoñ-čē khyud-čē mi-nug.* = He-coming-able-not-is. He is not able to come. *sil-čē šes-šē mi nug.* = It cannot be known how to read (it cannot be read). The first verb verbal noun is subject and the second is part of the predicate.

ཁོ་ཡོང་ཅེ་ལྷོད་ཅེ་མི་རུག།། སིལ་ཅེ་ཤེས་ཤེ་མི་རུག།།

vii. In the following sentences the first verb in both the forms, with and without additive particle, give the same meaning. *'grul-čē khyud-čē mi-nug* or *'grul khyud-čē mi-nug.* = (He) is not able to walk.

*sdad ñan-če* ‘dug or *sdad-če ñan-če* ‘dug. = It is possible to sit. *bčo-če/bčos/ñan-če* ‘dug. = It is possible to do or make.

**viii.** A verb by dropping its additive particle functions with the help of auxiliaries and helping verbs with full meaning.

*yoñ-če* = to come. *yoñ- ‘dug.* =(He) is coming. *lta-če* = to see, : *lta-rug.* = (He) is looking. *sil-če* = to read. *sil-lug.* = (He) is reading.

Here we notice another feature of the language. In the sentences the *subject* is not expressed but it is understood.

**ix.** The combined function of two verbs together in some forms can be explained as under. In the first column simple verb is given with its meaning. In the second column the principal verb *grul-če* has dropped its additive particle. It has a supporting verb *btañ-če* which means ‘to give’. Now the phrase *grul-btañ-če* =walk-give, means to walk spontaneously. In the third form both the verbs in full form become causative. To let the other one walk, to let talk, and to let jump.

<i>grul-če</i> = to walk	<i>grul-btañ-če</i>	<i>grul-če btañ-če.</i>
<i>lab-če</i> = to talk.	<i>lab-btañ-če.</i>	<i>lab-če btañ-če.</i>
<i>mčhoñ-če</i> = to jump.	<i>mčhoñ btañ-če</i>	<i>mčhoñ-če btañ-če.</i>

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## **Plural Formation in Tai Ahom: A Critically Endangered Language of Assam**

(With special reference to the language spoken in Sivsagar district of Assam, India)

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### **Abstract**

*Tai Ahom is one of the critically endangered languages of Assam. It belongs to Tai-Kadai sub family of languages of the Indo-Chinese family of languages (Grierson, 1903). The Tai Ahom speakers are mainly found in Patsaku, Parijat, Bokota i.e., Deodhai villages and Aakhaya of Sivsagar district. The present paper attempts to focus on the number in Tai Ahom. Number is not grammatically significant in the language, i.e., there is no subject predicate agreement as far as number is concerned. In other words, Tai Ahom contrasts two numbers: (i) singular and (ii) plural. Morphologically, the singular form of noun is unmarked however the plurality is expressed by means of postposition or reduplication.*

*Keywords: Tai Ahom, Tibeto-Burman, Number, Singular, Plural, Sivsagar.*

### **1. Introduction**

The Ahom language is one of the languages of Tai groups belonging to Tai-Kadai family of languages/Siamese-Chinese family of the Indo-Chinese forms of speech (Grierson, 1903) Ahom were the first Tai group in Assam led by Sukapha a Tai prince from Muang Mao. The Ahoms were gradually shifting to the majority Hindu population, after the sixteenth century (Morey, 2005). The Ahoms use Assamese language in their daily life,

although the Ahom language is used in religious chants and literary materials<sup>1</sup>.

As in many other Sino-Tibetan languages, Tai Ahom contrasts two numbers: (i) singular and (ii) plural. Morphologically, the singular form of noun is unmarked however the plurality is expressed by means of postposition or reduplication.

### 2.1. Pluralization of personal pronouns

In Tai Ahom plurality of personal pronoun are expressed with the help of new morphemes. It is a typical feature found in almost all the Tai languages. The expression of plurality in Tai Ahom is shown in the table no. 1 –

Person	Tai Ahom	Gloss(Sng)	Tai Ahom	Gloss(PL)
First	/kao/	‘I’	/rao/	‘we’
Second	/mau/	‘You’	/su/	‘You’
Third	/man/	‘He/She’	/k <sup>h</sup> ao/	‘They’
	/nai/	‘It’		

Table No. 1 pluralization of personal pronoun

Some of the examples are shown as -

a./lūk haŋ-kao/ ‘my child’

child my

b./lūk rao nam-nam/ ‘our children’

child our PL

c./rēn man/ ‘his house’

house his

d./rēn k<sup>h</sup>ow nam-nam/ ‘their houses’

house their PL

<sup>1</sup>Not spoken in daily life, used in religious chants and literary materials- ‘Ethnologue language of the world’.

## 2.2. Pluralization of demonstrative pronoun

In Tai Ahom pluralization of demonstrative pronoun are expressed with different morphemes and no addition of affixes with the singular form. The marker /nai/ for ‘this’ and /nan/ for ‘these’, ‘that’, ‘those’ respectively and numerals are also use for the pluralization. Some of the examples are illustrated as-

e. /pi nai/ ‘this pen’

pen this

f. /nan rēn ha haŋ-kaol/ ‘these are my five houses’

these house N my

g. /pi nan/ ‘that pen’

pen that

h. /lik k<sup>h</sup>ao nan/ ‘those books’

book PL those

## 2.3. Numerals as plural word

Like many other Tibeto-Burman languages, Tai Ahom also show plurality of noun with the help of numerals. Here, are some of the examples where the numerals follows the noun and precede the classifier. They are shown as-

i. /pu sip kɔ/ ‘ten grandfathers’

grandfather N CL

j. /ja pet kɔ/ ‘eight grandmother’

grandmother N CL

k. /paŋ-tai sɔŋ tu/ ‘two rabbits’

rabbit N CL

l. /nām-tao sɔŋ luk/ ‘two jars’

jar N CL

#### 2.4. Quantifiers as plural words

Like numeral, Tai Ahom also express plurality of noun by using the quantifiers, where quantifier follows the noun. It plays an important role for the process of pluralization as in many other languages of the world. They are exemplified as-

m. /tun-mai nam nam/ ‘many trees’

tree many

n. /pap-lik taŋ-lai/ ‘all books’

book all

o. /pap-lik chon/ ‘a few book’

book few

p. /phuŋ c<sup>h</sup>aŋ/ ‘herd of elephants’

herd elephant

q. /tun-mai chon-luŋ/ ‘some trees’

tree some

#### 2.5. Reduplication of interrogative pronouns

Reduplication of interrogative pronouns in Tai Ahom expresses the plurality. They are illustrated as-

r. /ka-saŋ ka-saŋ/ ‘what all’

what what

s. /p<sup>h</sup>au p<sup>h</sup>au/ ‘who all’

who who

t. /ti-t<sup>h</sup>au ti-t<sup>h</sup>au/ ‘where all’

where where

#### 2. 6. Pluralization of human noun

In Tai Ahom pluralization of human noun is expressed with the help of suffixation i.e., /k<sup>h</sup>ao/ is suffixed with the noun. They as shown in the table no. 2,3,4,5 & 6 -

<i>Tai Ahom</i>	<i>Gloss</i>
<i>/kun k<sup>h</sup>ao/ man PL</i>	<i>'men'</i>
<i>/p<sup>h</sup>u –iŋ k<sup>h</sup>ao/ woman PL</i>	<i>'women'</i>
<i>Tai Ahom</i>	<i>Gloss</i>
<i>/lūk-chai k<sup>h</sup>ao/ boy PL</i>	<i>'boys'</i>

Table No.2 Pluralization of human noun

### 2.7. Pluralization of non-human noun

Like human noun, non-human noun also uses the suffix */k<sup>h</sup>ao/* to express the plurality. They are shown in the table no. 3-

#### 2.7.1. Animals

<i>Tai Ahom(PL)</i>	<i>English(PL)</i>
<i>/tu-mâ k<sup>h</sup>ao/ CL dog PL</i>	<i>'dogs'</i>
<i>/tu-mio k<sup>h</sup>ao/ CL cat PL</i>	<i>'cats'</i>
<i>/tu-hu k<sup>h</sup>ao/ - CL cow PL</i>	<i>'cows'</i>

Table No. 3 Pluralization of animals



**2.7.2. Birds**

<i>Tai Ahom(PL)</i>	<i>English(PL)</i>
/nūk-kā k <sup>h</sup> ao/ CL crow PL	‘crows’
/nūk-tit k <sup>h</sup> ao/ CL parrot PL	‘parrots’
/nūk-chok k <sup>h</sup> ao/ CL sparrows PL	‘sparrows’

Table No.4 Pluralization of birds

**2.7.3. Insects**

<i>Tai Ahom(PL)</i>	<i>English(PL)</i>
/mut k <sup>h</sup> ao/ ant PL	‘ants’
/juŋ k <sup>h</sup> ao/ mosquito PL	‘mosquitoes’

Table No. 5 Pluralization of insects

**2.7.4. Inanimate**

<i>Tai Ahom(PL)</i>	<i>English(PL)</i>
/lik k <sup>h</sup> ao/ book PL	‘books’
/chaŋ-buŋ k <sup>h</sup> ao/ slate PL	‘slates’

Table No. 6 Pluralisation of inanimate

### 2.8. Pluralisation by means of reduplication

In Tai Ahom Plurality is also express by means of reduplication. Reduplication is one of the typical features of the Tai languages. In Tai Ahom /*nam-nam*/ is use for pluralization of the noun. They are show in the table no. 7 –

Tai Ahom	Gloss
<i>/lūk nam-nam/</i> <i>child PL</i>	'children'
<i>/rēn nam-nam/</i> <i>house PL</i>	'houses'

Table No. 7- Pluralization by means of reduplication

### 2.9. Pluralisation of kinship terms

In Tai Ahom, pluralization of kinship terms are expressed with the help of suffixation. Where, the suffix - /*k<sup>h</sup>ao*/ follows the noun. They are shown in the table no. 8 –

Tai Ahom	Gloss
<i>/nuŋ-saow k<sup>h</sup>ao/</i> <i>sister PL</i>	'sisters'
<i>/nuŋ-chai k<sup>h</sup>ao/</i> <i>brother PL</i>	'brothers'
<i>/mi k<sup>h</sup>ao/</i> <i>wife PL</i>	'wives'

Table No. 8- Pluralization of kinship terms

### **3. Conclusion**

Tai Ahom is a group of people living in Assam and Arunachal. The census of India does not provide particular census data for them. Tai-Ahom language is found only in written record called Buranji and a very a smaller number of people of the community know the oral as well as the written form of the language. Although, at present effort has made by the few people of the community to revive this language as a spoken language. This paper is about the numbers in Tai Ahom. From the above analysis, the conclusions may be drawn:

1. It is well known fact that Tai group of languages are isolating, so almost all the words are monosyllabic in nature.
2. As in many other Sino-Tibetan languages, Tai Ahom contrasts two numbers: (i) singular and (ii) plural. Morphologically, the singular form of noun is unmarked however the plurality is expressed by means of postposition or reduplication.
3. In Tai Ahom complete new morphemes are used to express the plurality of the personal pronouns.
4. Demonstrative pronouns in Tai Ahom are expressed with the help of different morphemes and no addition of affixes is found with the singular form. The marker /nai/ for 'this' and /nan/ for 'these', 'that', 'those' respectively and numerals are also used for the pluralisation of the noun.
5. In Tai Ahom plurality is expressed with the help of numerals. Where numerals follow the noun.

6. Like numerals, quantifiers also play an important role in plural formation in Tai languages.
7. Reduplication of interrogative pronouns also expresses the plurality in Tai Ahom language.
8. Pluralisation of human and non-human noun are expressed with help of suffixation, i.e., /*k<sup>h</sup>ao*/ is suffixed with the noun.
9. In Tai Ahom plurality is also expressed with the help of reduplication, /*nam-nam*/ is used to express the plurality, which follows the noun.
10. Pluraliation of kinship terms in Tai Ahom are also expressed by the suffix /*k<sup>h</sup>ao*/.

#### ABBREVIATIONS

Sng	=Singular
PL	= Plural
CL	= Classifier
N	= Numeral

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## The Instructive Value of Proverbs in Liangmai Society

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### Abstract

*This paper looks into selected Liangmai (ISO639-3 njn) proverbs and analyses their role as a tool for educating the younger generation about good behaviour and the norms and practices of their society. The paper aims to examine the relevance of Liangmai proverbs to the present generation and their educational value in helping them to stay connected to their culture and community<sup>1</sup>.*

**Keywords:** Proverbs, Liangmai society.

### 1. Definition and Importance

Proverbs are short, crisply structured sayings widely known in a community, which, convey traditional observations on human nature and natural phenomena, moral judgments, mockery, warnings (Simpson, J & Steve, R, 2000). Proverbs are particularly useful in oral cultures since they are often short, pithy statements that are easy to remember. Proverbs form

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an integral part of the society, reflect and shape social life in their concise form and authoritative style. They provide us with rich linguistic data for the study of cultural beliefs and social values of a particular society. Proverbs are symbols of communication packed into short sentences or even anecdotes and stories, sometimes carved on wood, stone or other materials, or even sung or danced. The language of proverbs has a rich vocabulary of words, phrases, and combination of words, symbols, pictures, allusions, association and comparison. Proverbs are drawn from and refer to all activities of society, natural objectives and phenomena. Proverbs are therefore an inevitable tool for education in values, culture and social attitudes. Proverbs also express the wisdom, moral codes and cultural heritage of a people or culture.

## **2. Social Use and challenges of Proverbs**

The social dimension of the proverb is undeniable. As there is no tongue for an individual, so there will be no proverb for an individual use. Proverbs certainly have been created by individuals. But they earn name and value only for social use (AKPOROBARO, F.B.O. & EMOVON, 1994). Moreover, proverbs have always been used as socializing tools.

Within the social context, our informants distinguish various fields of proverb use. We enumerate some functions below, according to the testimonies of our informants:

1) *Didactic and moralizing function.* This is the most general and implied in all other functions and typologies. And the informant witnesses: proverbs were used by seniors to install morals in the young, to educate and to teach about cultural and religious values.

2) *Philosophical function.* Proverbs “sharpen the mind and deepen the knowledge”. The idea is that the proverbs can be a school that transcends

common sense, questions and gives reasons. We are obviously entering the philosophical dimension of human knowledge.

3) *Therapeutic function.* A branch of modern medicine is called "logotherapy", i.e., one heals with the power of speech. Respondents recognize that the word power hidden in proverbs and its message can mitigate human suffering and can bring happiness to the embittered heart.

4) *Humorous function.* The proverbial word can bring contentment and joy, fun and entertainment.

Another observation, there is a core relationship between proverbs and contemporary changing times. May ancient proverbs still have some significance to modern generations? Our informants, in general, do not accept that proverbs are expired.

### **3. Introduction**

Before looking into Liangmai proverbs and their role in the society, this section provides a brief account of the Liangmais, their language, religion, and social and cultural life.

#### **3.1 The People**

Liangmai Naga ethnically belongs to the Mongoloid group of races inhabited in Nagaland and Manipur states of Northeast India. Originally Liangmais are known as kyliangmai khatmai. *Kyliang* means 'sector in a village' *khat* means 'one' and *mai* means 'people' and from this they are later called Liangmai (W, 2017). However, the most accepted meaning of the word "*Liangmai*" today is people who have grouped themselves in support of each other to live together as one community. In Manipur, Liangmais are found in Tamenglong headquarter, Tamei and Tousem sub division, Senapati district and Kanglatongbi of Imphal West. They are also



found in Tening Sub-division, Jalukie, Peren, Dimapur and Kohima of Nagaland. According to the 2011 Ethnologue, there are approximately 49,800 speakers of Liangmai<sup>2</sup>. The population of Liangmai in Manipur is higher than that of Nagaland.



**Liangmai youth performing cultural dance during Chagaa Festival**

### 3.2 The language

The language is called *Lianglad* “Liangmai language”. Liangmai (ISO 639-3 njn) is a Tibeto-Burman language under Western Naga group Burling (Burling, 2017). As this language did not have its own script, the missionaries used the Roman script to write this language at the beginning of 19<sup>th</sup> century for the first time. However, not much literature was produced by them in this language. At present, the language is taught as a language subject in Manipur in the under secondary and graduate courses and the Liangmai Literature textbook committee looks into the matters relating to the pedagogical development of the language.

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<sup>2</sup> The Census data of Liangmai does not distinguish between Liangmai of Manipur and of Nagaland. The figure provided by the Ethnologue is rather doubtful.

### **3.3 Social and cultural life**

The Liangmais have their own unique culture and tradition. Rice is their staple food along with meat and other vegetables. Fishing, hunting, and jhum cultivation (shifting cultivation) constitute their main occupations. The economy of the Liangmais is thus agrarian in nature. The community follows a patriarchal and monogamous family system. The foundation of Liangmai society is based on lineage and clan system. The general practice is that when a son marries, after one or two years, he becomes the head of his family and he goes and sets up a home of his own. The Liangmais have very rich social and cultural heritages which are preserved in the forms of festivals and feasts, dances, songs, music, dresses, and ornaments, and many other entertainment programs and cultural activities like games and sports. Their life is occupied with these different cultural activities all the year around.

### **3.4 Liangmai Indigenous Religion**

Liangmais had their own traditional religion but with the advent of the Christian missionaries, they embraced Christianity as their main religion. However, in Nagaland, a small section at Tening town, still uphold the traditional religion by affiliating a cult with Heraka which was founded by Mr. Jadonang and Rani Gaidinliu. Prior to the coming of Christianity, the Liangmais had their own traditional religious belief in the form of worshipping natural objects such as tree, stone, sun and other natural objects. They believed in the supreme God who is known as 'Charawang' perceived to be omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient. The Liangmais believed that the Supreme God is the creator God who reigned with limitless power in heaven and earth. They also have explicit ideas about gods, goddesses, and spiritual beings, and believe that their deities control their lives.

Besides the Supreme Being, belief in the existence of the spirits occupies the core of Liangmai faith. The spirit world is real for them and they believe in a variety of spirits. The Liangmais believed that the spirits guard

them from disease, pestilence and natural devastations like failure of crops, storms and floods. The Liangmais believed in the existence of many spirits (Charengna,W. & Haokip, D.M.K., 2018). Therefore, they are treated at different levels as they are feared, worshipped, appeased, etc. They can be categorized as benevolent and the malevolent spirits.

### **3.5 Oral Literature in Liangmai society**

Liangmais have a rich collection of oral literature in different genres that include folk narratives, songs, proverbs, riddles, tales, nursery rhymes, lullabies, war songs, sacrificial chants etc. In the olden days, at the end of the long, tiring day, they would gather around the fire and enjoy the stories of the people before them while all the time adding new ones to account for the present acts and deeds of their members. Younger members memorized them for lack of a way to write them down, and therefore orally passed along the history to their children. The younger ones longed for this moment when the grandparents started their stories. Thus, storytelling formed an important part of child socialization. The cultural knowledge learned through communicative practices such as storytelling includes cultural expectations about social roles and relationships.

In addition to this, there were also many bedtime stories for children which usually have a moral at the end of the story. There are also explanatory tales that explain cosmology and the universe, which are very entertaining, educative with rich moral content. Some of the common themes across these tales include: the undying true love, moral stories, the importance of hard work, the victory of good over evil, the fruit of perseverance, the importance of sharing, the poor or the weak helped by nature, the importance of love and unity in the family, etc. Hidden within these tales and proverbs are tools of social control which are used to educate the younger generation about the moral values and ethical ideals of the community. Thus, oral tradition in its various forms played a significant role in the life of the Liangmais.

#### 4. Data and Methodology

This is a descriptive and analytical research. The data for preparing this paper was collected mainly from primary and secondary sources. Primary data were collected from Tamei, Tamenglong district, Manipur and Tening, Peren district, Nagaland. In addition to this, data was also collected from social media like Facebook; WhatsApp groups (Liangmai Today).



(The highlighted portion in the map is where the field work was carried out)

#### 5. Proverbs in Liangmai

Proverbs in Liangmai are known as *kadincham*. The word *kadin* means ‘advice’ or statement and ‘*cham*’ means news or information. Thus, ‘*kadincham*’ means advice, information or statement that is acceptable (W, 2017). Proverbs are more frequently used by elderly members or those who have enough and varied experiences. They use the proverbs specially in offering suggestions on relative values of things or for the purpose of criticism. Elderly people are fond of using proverbs with younger persons to give wise advice and to convince them of some point. When used among people belonging to the same age group, the

speech act may hurt the ego of the person the performer is speaking to and may lead to an unhappy ending of the relationship.

Liangmais have a rich collection of proverbs, covering different aspects of living harmoniously in society. Proverbs are found in every interactional setting in Liangmai society ranging from casual conversation to formal speech. They are often used by elders of the community and invariably targeted to young listeners. The user of proverbs is often found to be superior in terms of age or kinship hierarchy. They make use of a large number of proverbs in their day-to-day conversations, contact situations and social gatherings. Proverbs in Liangmai occupy an important place both in the family and social life. They have their own distinct cultural traditions, social customs, festivals, language, religion, customary laws, traditional costumes, folklore and a rich tradition of folk literature like folk tales, legends, songs, proverbs, riddle and charms which have been transmitted to them by their ancestors from generation to generation and have shaped nurtured them till the present day. Proverbs circulating among the Liangmai society have been taking a significance role in the society as it helps in socialization and integration. These are used according to the time and situations.

Liangmai proverbs draw their images from various sources like plants, animals, people's habits, customs, occupations, and beliefs, social and political institutions. Proverbs are drawn from careful observations of social events, the lives of people and animals. Some are also drawn from experiences in occupations such as cultivation, hunting, and weaving. There are proverbs that talk about family and human relations, good and evil, poverty and riches, joy and sorrow. Each proverb has a moral teaching. Liangmai proverbs are metaphors drawn from daily life or the observation of nature or are short summaries of experience. Liangmai proverbs are often made on the models of already existing types, and like all folklore material, has many traditional variations, which are aimed at the summing up of everyday experience in getting on in the world as it is. Very often, situations having social, legendary, mythological and historical bases are drawn as comparisons to reflect a particular quality of a person, whether

good or bad. A good number of comparisons are drawn from the natural world and used with striking effect in the human context.

## 6. Characteristics of Liangmai Proverbs

The Liangmai society has a rich oral tradition. Since literacy came only with the advent of the British missionaries, the traditional Liangmai village depended on orality as a medium of transferring knowledge and culture from one generation to the other. Hence, proverbs which were handed down orally from one generation to the next became an invaluable source of education and transmitting knowledge. The elder generation used proverbs to educate and instruct their children. A society or a community can be studied by studying the proverbs and folktales created and transmitted within the community. There are proverbs that talk about family and human relations, good and evil, poverty and riches, joy and sorrow with moral teaching.

- a. Situations having social, legendary, mythological and historical bases are drawn, as comparisons, to reflect a particular quality of a person, whether good or bad.
- b. There is a lot of didacticism in these proverbs in which vices are portrayed and their consequences elucidated.

## 7. Classification of Liangmai proverbs

The using of proverbs is a part of daily activities in the Liangmai society and it is like forefathers' knowledge which has given for their offspring as a treasure and hidden knowledge. The proverbs which are used in Liangmai society has played a crucial role and even it has form as like folklore and these are importance for encouragement among themselves. Liangmai proverbs are divided into different kinds and discuss in the following:

### 7.1 Proverbs relating to women

In Liangmai society, women take important role and place in the family, village and in their area and even as an individual. To be a matured and expert for domestic work and in culture the Liangmai women need to learn and acquire knowledge so that they can adjust morally. Women can mingle and build up their society. Therefore, there are many proverbs relating to women which can be seen in the following:

(1) *Maipui kasa tu lungbo ra chaphitop lung ga tatukang ngot tad dao lakbo kum.*

**Literal translation:** Marrying a cruel woman is like a stone in your shoes that makes walking difficult.

**Meaning:** Women are required to be kind, soft spoken and good. A woman who does not possess these qualities is often scorned by the society.

(2). *Chagapui nphi buang sai panah di nphi buang ye.*

**Literal translation:** If the mother crab crawls in the wrong direction so will the baby crab be.

**Meaning:** Bad mothers produce bad children. Bad attributes of the children are said to be inherited from their mothers. Hence, young men are instructed to look for life partners from daughters of good mothers.

Hence, young men are instructed to look for life partners from so called good parents.

### 7.2 Proverbs relating to agriculture

The mainstay of the Liangmai economy is agriculture, with about 90 percent of the population directly or indirectly depending on agriculture for their livelihood. Therefore, proverbs relating to agricultural life and practices in Liangmai society are circulating among them through word of mouth. Some of them are given below:

(3) *Wa kamsi makmai pagu mania tu madam me.*

**Literal translation:** Bad workmen blame their tools.

**Meaning:** This proverb is often used to refer to a person who has done something badly and tries to put the blame on his/her equipment rather than admitting his/her own lack of skill. For instance, when a farmer blames his equipment for his poor harvest, this proverb is used to refer to such a person.

### 7.3. Proverbs having moral lessons

Proverbs are like treasures in Liangmai society. Proverbs are essential for common people and through this human culture remain alive. With regards to Liangmai proverbs are special and important tool for imparting knowledge and wisdom. Some of the common proverbs, which are still prevalent and relevant in the present day, are listed in the following section along with their literal translation and usages. Accurate translation is difficult, as proverbs are context dependent. To understand the meaning of these proverbs, it is important to understand the context in which they are used and the culture of the people. Nonetheless, attempts have been made to translate the meaning of the proverbs. Examples are given below:

(4) *Chakui nia malong khat galung silakge.*

**Literal translation:** No two tigers can live in the same mountain.

**Meaning:** Two opponents cannot live together in the same village or society.

(5) *Tathanpa paa gasu sai, chamai palad gasu sai.*

**Literal translation:** Deer dies because of his footprint so does man die because of his word.

**Meaning:** It talks about the power of spoken words. Words when spoken cannot be taken back. It focuses on the importance of keeping one's words.



(6) *Nduipui niu alui pa ga mawangbo kumme.*

**Literal translation:** Tadpole rules over the footprints of buffalo.

**Meaning:** Referring to a person who is proud of his little wealth and knowledge.

(7) *Ka agabo rasi niu hum diang ye.*

**Literal translation:** Stolen fruit tastes sweeter.

**Meaning:** Anything done in secret is more enjoyable.

(8) *Tasing hasai chapai niu katiang thiu we.*

**Literal translation:** Where there is no wood, bamboo can also be used as a pillar.

**Meaning:** Wood is very important so is a good leader. However, in his absence need to be replaced with anyone available.

(9) *Kapangmai leng chapiu ha ye.*

**Literal translation:** There is no medicine for a fool.

**Meaning:** Foolish man will never accept advice or correction.

(10) *Kadao machoubo ga kaniura machou dao we.*

**Literal translation:** Consuming whatever you find can also lead to consuming the venom of a snake.

**Meaning:** Gluttony is despised in the society. Eating too many things is harmful for health.

(11) *Maiki gan niu tiuwi diang ye.*

**Literal translation:** The dish of others seems to taste better.

**Meaning:** A stranger is given more importance than a known person.

(12) *Tasing Tatu tu ka-npou kumme.*

**Literal translation:** Like talking to wood and stone.

**Meaning:** Referring to someone who pretends not hear and does not respond, like talking to a deaf and dumb person.

(13) *Kali leng sing wang hamakge.*

**Literal translation:** There are many trees (branches) for squirrel to escape.

**Meaning:** This proverb is directed to a person who always finds ways to win an argument in spite of being at fault.

(14) *Kabak ba kuak karaimai sang jing ye.*

**Literal translation:** A man who stamped first on the stool of a pig.

**Meaning:** Old age is given due importance because experience provides more skills and knowledge.

(15) *Maipiu paronna pa mpui tamot kham me.*

**Literal translation:** ‘A man who passes stool in his own path’.

**Meaning:** This refers to a person who blocks his own opportunity by his own actions or words.

(16) *Tazuang paronna pazam tu khon madi ye.*

**Literal translation:** The monkey makes its own wounds bigger.

**Meaning:** A person who discloses his own flaws leads himself into trouble.

(17) *Kabak wang gakachia matiu khaibo kumme.*

**Literal translation:** Like giving a gold necklace to a pig.

**Meaning:** Not realizing the worth of something precious.

(18) *Chakui piu ndebo nai chami tiu mak kin jiulo?*

**Literal translation:** When does the lion not eat meat?

**Meaning:** Like a lion that can get his prey every day, so can you achieve whatever you aspire.

Laziness was frowned upon and anybody who neglected work was warned through proverbs like

(19) *Thainai kamlu rabo ngamsi wadaodi nsonnai leng khai diak dulau.*

**Literal translation:** Don't pull off till tomorrow what could be done today.

**Meaning:** There is not anything that has the authority to guarantee you will live tomorrow. Life is short; today may be your last day on earth, you do not have the time as you think. Think and act for today for tomorrow may be too late.

(20) *Abeng tasiangsi tu kakhon kumme.*

**Literal translation:** Like an owl waiting to eat *Tasiangsi* (a kind of fruit that is inedible).

**Meaning:** Wooing a girl whom he will never get.

(21) **Liangmai:** *Tingkai hunsaichapiunui di malai ye.*

**Literal translation:** If the wind blows, the leaves move.

**Meaning:** Any secrets work will be uncovered, the truth will come forth, and every behavior and action will be vindicated.

(22) *Pachun kengmai ra wadaodi pen lakge*

**Literal translation:** A man who has many hearts will never be satisfied.

**Meaning:** A fickle minded person is never contented in life.

## 8. Importance of Proverbs in the Society

The critical importance of proverbs in the Liangmai society is used to instruct, advice as a form of social control. Liangmais use different proverbs to educate and instil discipline to its young populace in different life occasions. The elderly in the society had the exclusive knowledge of the proverbs and used to teach the community's moral principles and educate them on important aspects of life. Based on the nature of Liangmai social structure, proverbs are critical aspect in moral development of a child.

Without proverbs, the language would be like a skeleton without flesh, a body without soul and speech sounds good when it is interspersed with proverbs, food tastes good when it is cooked with butter. These examples clearly show the important place of proverbs in Liangmai society, they elevate speech from the mere nominal value of word to a higher aesthetic plane.

## 9. Functions of Liangmai proverbs

Liangmai proverbs have different functions in different context. They mean different things to different people in different context and they are still used in every domain of life. It may be claimed that they have not lost their popularity and they are continually existence in the present society. Some of the important functions of proverbs are discussed in the following.

Liangmai proverbs had and still have a didactic function. By using them, people wish to teach people, give advice, help in difficult situations, show people what the most important things in life are, show the proper way in life. Most Liangmai proverbs have this instructive function as they educate and teach morals. For instance, on the importance of obedience to parents, there is a popular proverb relevant till today.

(a) '*Papui papiu kadin piimak maira kambo hina tathui makge*' which means a person who does not obey his/her parents even the leaf he/she plucks is torn or not good. This is a proverb often told to children to teach them the importance of obedience to parents. One can never be successful without obedience to his/her parents. This is one proverb everyone comes across as a child.

On values of goodness and kindness and reward for good and punishment for evil there are many proverbs. One such popular proverb still prevalent today is: (b). *Paniu lin khaibo si paniu ge lan ne* 'We reap what we sow. This proverb is similar to the English proverb, 'As you sow, so shall you reap. This is used to teach children to do good so they reap the fruit of their deeds. In other words, if you do good things, you will receive good things and if you do bad deed, bad things will happen to you. Liangmai proverbs also cover aspects of patience and perseverance. (c) *ginsibo/khensibo niu ngam ne*, 'Perseverance leads to victory in the battle'. Through patience and perseverance, success is obtained or a battle is won. Children are taught the importance of endurance and perseverance through this proverb.

Proverbs are also a tool by means of which we can discredit or mock someone or criticize someone or a situation. Using politeness, in a short, pithy sentence, we can hide our own thoughts and say something we would not dare to say in a direct manner. A person who loves to praise himself is often mocked by saying (d) *Pa ronna patu maning madibo*. Laziness and gluttony are scorned in the society. A lazy person can be satirically told (e) *kamakemai leng chapiu ha ye*. There is no medicine for lazy person. A greedy person may also be warned by saying (f) *kadao machou kaniu ra machou daone*. Consuming whatever you find can also lead to consuming the venom of a snake. This also shows that gluttony is despised in the society. A greedy person loses self-respect. A stubborn person who does not listen to anyone is often criticized by comparing him to a wild mithun whose nose has not been pierced. (g) *kabui maniu but makbo khu we*. You are like a mithun whose nose is not pierced.

From the above discussions, we see that proverbs perform several important functions. They can perform different roles depending on the communicative setting they are used. There are different proverbs for different situations. Meanings are generated by contexts and the same holds true for proverbs as well.

## **10. Significance of Liangmai proverbs**

In Liangmai society, proverbs form an integral part of Liangmai oral tradition. Although these proverbs have been transmitted orally for generations from time immemorial, they have not lost their relevance and importance till the present day. Proverbs still serve as impersonal vehicles for personal communication. Moreover, these fragments of wisdom offer many interesting insights into the past of the people. Proverbs provide a vehicle through which social expectations are passed on and preserved for many years. Proverbs are very effective in exercising social control in most Liangmai society.

As Liangmai proverbs have been transmitted orally for generations, they bear the socio-cultural traces from the past. Proverbs also reflect the collective perception and attitude of the community towards life and all the phenomena of the world around them. In addition, Liangmai proverbs are also a manifestation of their ancestral knowledge that has relevance till today. This is evident from the way proverbs have been preserved as a rich piece of oral tradition and used widely by Liangmais in their everyday conversation. Liangmai proverbs also have high moral content and are often used by the older members of the society to impart social and cultural values to the younger generation.

Liangmais use proverbs as a source of inspiration, information, enlightenment and their way-of-life is often guided by it. Proverbs also provide us with rich linguistic data for the study of cultural beliefs and social values of a particular society. Proverbs form an integral part of the society, reflect and shape social life in their concise form and authoritative style. Through these proverbs, history, culture and the inner experience of the people can be understood. Furthermore, proverbs provide an insight into

their socio-cultural life and a glimpse of their way of life. Thus, in Liangmai society, proverbs are essential for a deep understanding of the communal bases of the society and the bonds which tie them together.

## 11. Conclusion

Liangmai proverbs are like treasure in their society and culture. Through this the behaviors and characters one can feel the influence of proverbs in Liangmai society. These proverbs are essential for common people and through this human culture remain alive. Proverbs have not lost their popularity and they are continually existence in the present Liangmai society. Proverbs are not merely a part of their folklore but a very much part of their life. In Liangmai society, proverbs have been and will remain a dominant and valuable instrument for the transmission of culture, social morality, manners and ideas from one generation to another. This is because proverbs are wise sayings of the people based on their experiences and are reflection of their social values, norms, customs and world view.

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## Who are Zomi?

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### Abstract

*This paper gives a brief outline of the origin and history of Zomi tribe. The writer, who happens to be a native speaker of the tribe tries to clear the doubts, created by some non- community scholars among the lay men. After explaining the meaning of the word Zomi a small introduction of the tribe has been given. The paper also tries to explain the relationship among Kuki, chin and Lushai terms.*

### Introduction

The term 'Zomi' meaning, 'Zo People' is derived from the generic name 'Zo', the progenitor of the Zomi. In the past they were little known by this racial nomenclature. They were known by the non-tribal plain peoples of Burma, Bangladesh and India as Chin, Kuki, or Lushai. Subsequently the British employed these terms to christen those 'wild hill tribes' living in the 'un-administered area', and was subsequently legalized to be the names for the newly adopted subjects by Queen Victoria of England. However, they called themselves Zomi since time immemorial. They are Zomi not because they live in the highlands or hills, but are Zomi and called themselves Zomi because they are the descendants of their great -great ancestor, 'Zo'.

In this regards, F.K. Lehman, Professor of Anthropology and Linguistics, University of Illinois (USA), who had done extensive study on the Chin of Burma, said '*No single Chin word has explicit reference to all the peoples we customarily call Chin, but all - or nearly all of the peoples have a special word for themselves and those of their congeners with whom they are in regular contact. This word is almost always a variant form of a single root, which appears as Zo, Yo, Ysou, Shou and the like.*' Relating to this generic name, Fan-Cho a diplomat of the Tang dynasty of China, mentioned in 862 AD a Kingdom in the Chindwin Valley 'whose Princes and Chiefs were called Shou (Zo)'. In 1783, Father Vincentius Sangermano in his book, 'A Description of the Burmese Empire' described them as, "a petty nation called JO (JAW)" Sir Henry Yule, as early as 1508 mentioned about the YO country the location of which was "*west of the mouth of the Kyen-dwen (Chindwin) the interior of Doab, between the Irrawaddy and the Chindwin, from Mout-Shabo upwards and the whole of the hill country east and north-east of the capital, towards the Ruby-mines, the upper course of Hyitnge, and the Chinese frontier*". Rev. Howard Malcolm also testified thus, '*The YAW (ZO) is on the lower waters of the Khyendiwen (Chindwin) not far from Ava. The district is sometimes called YO or JO*'.



Another early use of the name ZO with reference to the Zomi (Kuki-Chin-Lushai), the first on the Lushai Hills side which till then was a *terra incognita*, was by Col. T.H. Lewin, the first white man to know the inhabitants of Lushai Hills (Mizoram). He wrote that he came to know, during the Lushai Expedition of 1871-72 that, *'the generic name of the whole nation is Dzo'* Dr. Francis Buchanan also wrote of Zomi and Zomi language, while Captain Pemberton mentioned Zo or Jo in his 'Reports on the Eastern Frontiers of British India, 1835'. The fact that the Zomi were known as ZOU or YO or YAW, before their society evolved into clan-based organization and lineage segmentation, was pointed out by Dr. G.A. Grierson in his survey, thus *'The name (Kuki and Chin) is not used by the tribes themselves, who use titles such as ZOU or YO or CHO.'* Rev Sukte T. Hau Go, a former lecturer of Mandalay University (Burma) also shared the same view, *'Zomi is the correct original historical name of our people, from the Naga hill to the Bay of Bengal. To the north of Tedim, the Thadous and other tribes call themselves Yo; in Falam, Laizo. The Tedim people call themselves Zo; the Lushais, Mizo; in Haka, Zotung, Zophei, Zokhua. In Gangaw area Zo is pronounced as YAW, in Mindat Jo or CHO; and in Paletwa Khomi. In Prome, Thayetmyo, Sandoway and Bassein areas they call themselves A-Sho. So, inspite of slight variations Zomi is our original historical national name.'*

Regarding the truth of Zomi as the racial designation of the so-called Kuki-Chin people, U Thein Re Myint, a well-known Burmese Writer, who knew Chin history, perhaps better than the Chin themselves remarks *'Even though these tribes of people, who are called Chin, do not necessarily protest their name, their original name is, in fact, Zomi.'* Two British administrators, Bertram S. Carey and H.N. Tuck who place Zo people under modern system of administration record as thus *'Those of the Kuki tribes which we designate as "Chins" do not recognise that name.....they call themselves YO (ZO)...and YO (ZO) is the general name by which the Chins call their race'.*

Another European writer, Sir J. George Scott also claimed that, the Zomi never called themselves by such names as Kuki or Chin or Lushai. He wrote *'The names like Kuki and Chin are not national, and have been given to them by their neighbors. Like others, the people do not accept the name given by the Burmese and ourselves; they do not call themselves Chins, and they equally flout the name of Kuki which their Assamese neighbours use. They call themselves Zhou or Shu and in other parts Yo or Lai.'*

It is, therefore, no wonder that Zomi use the term Zo, Zou, Zhou, Chou, Shou, Yo, Jo, Yaw, Shu, etc in their speech and poetic language as Zo-Vontawi, Zo-lei, Zogam or Zoram, Zo-tui, Zo-fa, etc; in naming geographical names such as Zotlang, Zopui, Zobawks; and in some of the clan names like Zophei, Zotung, Zokhua, Laizo, Bawmzo, Zote, etc. All these have a common derivation from the generic name, "ZO". It is also because of this fact that scholars like Dr. Vum Kho Hau, Prof. Laldena, Dr. Vum Son, Dr. Tualchin Neihzial, Dr. H. Kamkhenthang, Dr. Mangkhosat Kipgen, Cap. Sing Khaw Khai, Dr. J. M. Paupu, Pu K. Zawla, Pu R. Vanlawma, B. Langthanliana, Dr. V. Lunghnema, Dr. Hawlngam Haokip, Pu L. S. Gangte, Pu T. Gougin, Pu

Thang Khan Gin Ngaihte, Rev. S. Prim Vaiphei, Rev. Khup Za Go, Pu L. Keivom, Rev. S. T. Hau Go, Dr. Khen Za Sian, Prof. Thang Za Tuan, Rev. Sing Ling etc. concluded that ZO is the ancestor of the Zo people (Zomi).

### **Origin of the name**

There are two views about the origin of the word, 'ZO'. The first and most acceptable view is that Zo is a person whose descendants are called *Zo-fate or Zo-suante*. Some scholars like Pu Thawng Khaw Hau and Pu Captain K. A. Khup Za Thang presented the genealogical table of various Zomi clans in which they strongly claim that they are the descendants of Zo. *Zo Khang Simna Laibu* and *Zo Suan Khang Simna Laibu*(Genealogy of the Zo Race of Burma) cover extensively the genealogy of Zo people in Chin State as well as those living in Mizoram and Manipur. Dr. Vum Kho Hau and Dr. Vum Son trace all the Zomi lineal to Zo. Pu Dr. V. Lunghnema wrote the Genealogy of the Hmar tribes, a branch of the Zo family, and he identified Zo as the ancestor of the Hmar clan. This interpretation of the term 'ZO' is substantiated by the fact that Zomi have a tradition of naming their clans after the head of each clan, thereby, Hualngo, Zahao, Guite, Singsit, Sailo, etc clans carry each of their fore-father's name. Likewise, it is logically true with Zo, Dzo or a very similar sounding one for the name of Zo as the founder of Zo people or Zomi. So, the word Zo is a generic name and Zomi is derived from the name of the ancestor with reference to his descendants. The second view suggests that the term Zo might have been derived from the Zo King of the Zhou Dynasty (B.C. 1027-225) of China. The main argument in this regard is that in ancient times the names of the ruling dynasty became the identity for the subjects.

Whatever differences of opinion there may be, regarding the origin of Zomi, there is ample historical evidence to support that they are Zomi from time immemorial, and lived together under the umbrella of one cultural unity of ancient Zo.

### **Meaning of the name**

On the meaning of the term Zo, there are intellectuals who translate Zo as *Highlanders*. This translation of Zo as *highland* or cold region and subsequently Mizo or Zomi as highlanders or people of the hills is too simplistic and misleading, because the people called themselves Zomi when they lived in the plains of the Chindwin Valley and elsewhere. The word 'ZO' or 'Zo LO' might mean highland or highland farms but not highlanders nor highland farmers. Pu R. Vanlawma, a veteran politician and a prolific writer of Mizoram has correctly advocated that *'It was not the people who derived their name ZO from the high altitude of their abode, but on the contrary it was the high lands and especially the farm lands there, called 'Zo Lo' which derived their name from the Zo people who cultivated the farms'*. The generic name 'ZO' has no relation with the geographical-climatic term 'Zo'. As a matter of fact, Zo is a generic name whose word is of local origin and needs no further explanation, whereas 'mi' means man or people and there is no ambiguity about it. In this way of historical process, Zo people identified themselves with Zo and emerged as a race to be called ZOMI among mankind. The Zomi are, therefore, those ethnic

or linguistic, or cultural groupings of people who had commonly inherited the history, tradition and culture of Zo as their legacies, irrespective of the names given to them by outsiders.

### **Generic Vs Imposed names**

It is unfortunate and quite confusing for insiders as well as outsiders that the Zomi, who belong to the same racial stock, shared history, culture and traditions are recognized by different names: while the Burmese called them ‘Chin’ or ‘Khyan’, the Bengalis and others in India called them ‘Kuki’, with a variety of spellings. The British added a third name, Lushai, in the early 1870s to compound the confusion. However, key British Military Officers and Civil Administrators soon realized that the people whom they called by various names were the same people and that they should be dealt with as a single group. Thus, they began to refer to them by various hyphenated names, e.g., Chin-Lushai (A.S. Reid), Lusei-Kuki (J. Shakespear), Kuki-Chin (G.A. Grierson), and even a triple hyphenated form was used, eg. Kuki-Lushai-Chin (S. Fuchs). What did they call themselves before terms like Kuki, Chin or Lushai were imposed upon them have been much discussed. For better understanding of our racial and national nomenclature, the origin and meaning of the imposed names may be discussed. Please click below links for further study: Chin, Kuki & Lushai.

### **Chin**

As already mentioned, in Burma the Zomi are known as Chin. It has since become a matter of great controversy how this terminology originated. In this respect many scholars advanced different theories. B.S. Carey and H. N. Tuck asserted it to be a Burmese corruption of the Chins word “Jin” or “Jen” which means man. Prof. F. K. Lehman was of the view that the term might be from the Burmese word ‘Khyan’ which means ‘basket’, saying, *‘The term ‘Chin’ is imprecise. It is a Burmese word (khyan), not a Chin Word. It is homologous with the contemporary Burmese word meaning basket’*.

Implied thus is that the basket carrying inhabitants of the Chin Hills bordering the plain Burmans are Chin. But according to Prof. G. H. Luce, an eminent scholar of the early Burmese history, the term “Chin” (khyan in old Burmese) was derived from the Burmese word meaning “ally” or “comrade” in describing the peaceful relationship which existed between the Chins and the Pagan Burman in their historical past. His interpretation was based on the thirteenth century Pagan inscription. However, the same inscription also revealed the controversial slave trade along the Chindwin River. However, in the year 1950 the Burmese Encyclopedia defined Chin as “ally”.

This official publication was challenged by Pu Tanuang, an M.P. from Mindat (Chin State) in the Burmese Parliament. He criticized the Government for politicizing the name. The Revered S. T. Hau Go, a former lecturer of Mandalay University writes, *‘Whatever it meant or means, however it originated and why, the obvious fact is that the appellation “Chin” is altogether foreign to us. We respond to it out of necessity. But we never appropriate it and never accept it and never use*

*it to refer to ourselves. It is not only foreign but derogatory, for it has become more or less synonymous with being uncivilized, uncultured, backward, even foolish and silly. And when we consider such name calling applied to our people as “Chinbok” (stinking Chin) we cannot but interpret it as a direct and flagrant insult and the fact that we have some rotten friends’.*

Whatever the case may be, from the above evidence it can be concluded that the word was coined by the Burmese and it was adopted by the British officials. Investigation and research, however, proves that such a word as “Chin” does not exist in the vocabulary of the Zomi. The people themselves do not use in their folksongs, poetry or language. Even today the name remains strange to the illiterate people of the countryside in the very region called Chin Hills in Burma.

### **Kuki**

Probably the first recorded use of the name “Kuki” appeared in the History of Tripura as early as 1512 AD. During the reign of Tripura Raja Dhanya Manikya (around 1490 AD), it was pointed out that, wild race called Kukees live Thannangchi Forest of Tripura. Yet the origin of the word itself is most obscure. The colonial historians divided the Zomi under two names, i.e. the “Kuki” and the “Lushai”. This was clearly demonstrated in the writing of Rawlins. In his paper published in the *Asiatic Research Vol. II, p.12* he called the people “*Cucis*” or “*Mountaineers from Tipra*” by adopting the name used by the Bengali and Assamese when referring to the Zomi of Chittagong Hill Tract and Tripura Hills. Colonel John Shakespear clubbed them together and called them “*the Lushai-Kuki Clans*”. He even included most of the hill tribes of the Lushai Hills, parts of Manipur, North Cachar Hills, and Tripura, who have the same cultural affinity, customs and mode of living. In this he was supported by the British statesmen, ethnographers and linguists. On the other hand, he was also fully aware that the words “Kuki” and “Lushai” were not accepted by the people to whom the name applied. In fact, there never was such a word as “Kuki” in the vocabulary of any of the Zomi dialects. It is neither a clan name nor family name. The Lushai too were averse to the name Kuki. In the meantime, William Shaw wrote a book on the *Thadou Kuki* and he tried to put all the people of the group under the racial nomenclature of Thadou Kukis. All the other tribes, except the Thadou speaking and those willing to call themselves Kuki, do not accept it at all. It has instead now become a bone of contention among the two- the Thadou and the Kuki, which is exemplified by the existence of Association/ Organizations like KSO, TSA, TKSU, TTC, etc. It is known that they even submitted a memorandum to the Government of Manipur to ban the book. The anti-Kuki stand of the various Tribes of Manipur was further strengthened by the resolution of a meeting held on the 26<sup>th</sup> June, 1942 in which they expressed their desire not to identify themselves as Kuki.

### **Lushai**

The term Lushai, native ‘Lusei,’ is commonly used to refer to the Zomi of the Lushai Hills. It was Mr. Edger, the Deputy Commissioner of Cachar who first officially used the term “Lushai” instead of “Zomi” around the year 1897. It may be mentioned that the term may have been derived from

the custom of certain tribes keeping their hair long and fastening it in a knot at the back of the head (*Lu-head, shei-long i.e., keeping the head long or long head*). It could also have originated from the custom of head hunting (*Lu=head, Shai=cut i.e. head cutting*). Such interpretations or fanciful explanations were not accepted by John Shakespear, the Superintendent of the Lushai Hills and an authority on the Lushai. He made it clear that “Lushai is our way of spelling the word, the proper way to spell the word, so as to represent the actual sound, as spoken by the people, is Lushei (Lusei). From this writer it is apparent that the word “Lushai” is derived from “Lusei”, the name of the most powerful dominating tribe of the Lushai Hills who rule under the title “Sailo”. However, the British later adopted “Lushai” as the official designation of all Zo people of the Lushai Hills. Then in the year 1946 the tribes of the Lushai Hills changed their nomenclature into Mizo. It was on the 9th of April, 1946 that the Mizo Union was founded at the Muallungthu (Lushai Hills) Conference. The primary object of the Mizo Union was to bring the Zo people under one nomenclature and when the British left their country to set up an independent state of the Zomi living in the Indo-Burma borderland.

### **Mizo – Zomi**

Synonymously and literally, Zomi and Mizo are the same, having the etymological root, ‘Zo’. The term Mizo covers all Zo peoples as does Zomi according to their respective users. It is only a matter of pre-fixation and suf-fixation of ‘MI’, meaning man or people to ‘ZO’. If ‘MI’ is prefixed to Zo, we get Mizo, whereas if it is suffixed, we get ZOMI. According to K. Zawla, Mizo is a poetical form of Zomi. For instance, the accepted poetical expression for a barking deer and a hornbill will be **Khisa** and **Phualva** respectively, whereas their accepted non-poetical expressions are **Sakhi** and **Vaphual**. However, Zomi is more logical and is the right sequence of syllables, in contrast to Mizo. Because even the people who are more or less familiar with the word Mizo normally accept Zo-fa as the correct grammatical combination of the word when they wish to mean sons of Zoland. They do not say Fa-Zo poetically or literally. If ZOFA is deemed to be correct, Zomi should be deemed to be correct. Moreover, the term Zomi is much older than Mizo. Pu K. Zawla believes that the Zo people had called themselves ‘Zomi’ around the 14th century AD whereas ‘Mizo’ became the official name of the people of Mizoram in 1954 only when the Lushai Hills was changed to ‘Mizo Hills’. Once Zo is accepted as the generic name of the so-called Kuki-Chin-Lushai people, affixing ‘MI’ to ‘ZO’ either as a prefix or suffix should no longer be a problem. The affix ‘mi’ was considered necessary only due to the earlier misinterpretation of the term ‘Zo’ as hill or highland. As the general population became aware of their progenitor, Zo the people may still be called ZOMI (Zo + People) or Mizo (People + Zo) and their country Zogam/Zoram. Even Mizoram is endearingly referred to as Zoram as in the Mizoram state song “*Kan Zoram.....*” (*our Zoland*).

In short, imposed names like Kuki, Chin, or Lushai which may have had derogatory origins have no acceptability for common nomenclature among the affected people themselves because they are:

- i. alien and imposed and not born of the people;
- ii. if they have any intelligible meaning at all they incline to be on the abusive, unpalatable and derogatory side;
- iii. only popularly used by outsiders and is not taking root in the social fabric of the tribes themselves, and
- iv. there has been a tendency to reserve these terms for a particular tribe or a dialectical group and not for all the tribes as their common name.

It is a fact of modern history that in the past Zo people identified themselves willy-nilly either as Chin or Kuki or Lushai in order to be accepted in Military services. Today things have changed. The search for an acceptable name that is not only popular, appropriate and meaningful but is the original name for a common identity of the Zo racial group ends with Zomi, after the progenitor, Zo. The Zomi Tribes, who are recognized by the Indian government under the Scheduled Tribes in India, would like to have a common nomenclature by which they should be known Zomi being their original name, on June 26, 1993 at Pearsonmun, Churachandpur several Zomi tribes gathered and unanimously decided on common identity which reads thus: *'Common Identity: In the continuation of Zomi movement, the members felt the necessity of having a common identity with which all tribes can identify themselves without any reservation or hesitation for unity, solidarity and safety. The leaders present, therefore, adopted the name ZOMI for common identity which will take immediate effect from today'*.

Today, more and more Zomi tribes realized the impropriety of calling themselves 'Nation' and while accepting Zomi as their national name effected a change in the naming of their tribe's apex organization, viz, Simte National Council was changed into Simte Tribe Council, Paite National Council to Paite Tribe Council, Gangte Tribes Union, etc. Thus, Zomi as the racial common nomenclature of all Zo descendants is an undeniable historical and anthropological fact. There is not an iota of bigotry when Zomi champion that 'Zomi' is the genuine national name of those who have been called Kuki-Chin-Lushai people by imposition. The remedy to having confusing names lies in calling ourselves Zomi, as Pu Dr. Vum Kho Hau, had pointed out *'...had the word Kuki or Chin or Lushai been changed to ZOMI at that time, the right word for calling the various tribes and clans of the Zo race inhabiting the areas joining Burma, East Pakistan (Bangladesh) and Assam (India) would have been answered a long time ago'*.

The era of truth and nationalism begin to dawn upon the Zomi. The name, Zomi, which remained inactive in the social, cultural layers and folksongs of the past, is now surfacing in the social, cultural, religious and political folds.

## Semantic Interpretations of the Word 'pot' in Manipuri

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### Abstract

*The present paper is an attempt to highlight the different meanings or interpretations of the word 'pot' in different contexts. It gives different meanings in different contexts, distinguishing it from its denotative meaning. It tries to show the connotative meanings of the pot, meaning in English is 'thing' depending on different contexts of conversation. It can occur with different connotative meanings in the context whereby some socially unaccepted words have to be substituted to make a socially accepted speech form. In this sense, the lexical item pot is used as a substitute item in Manipuri utterances.*

**Keywords:** *general interpretation, positive connotation, negative connotation, denotative meaning, connotative meaning.*

### 1. Introduction

Manipuri (Ethnologue ISO 639-3mni)<sup>1</sup> which is locally known as 'Meiteilon/Meeteilon' is the first language of the people in the valley of Manipur and the second language of those for whom Manipuri is not their mother tongue. The total population of Manipuri speakers is 17,61,079<sup>2</sup>. It is one of the Tibeto-Burman languages of Southeast Asia, which has its script and literature and is mainly spoken in Manipur, North-Eastern India. It is one of the Tibeto-Burman languages of the Sino-Tibetan family which is placed in the Kuki-Chin proper separately by Grierson (1904), and in the

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.ethnologue.com/language/mni>

<sup>2</sup><https://censusindia.gov.in/2011Census/Language-2011/Statement-1.pdf>

Meitei branch of the Kukish section by Shafer (1974). Bradley (1997:29) put Manipuri under the Kuki-Chin subgroup of Tibeto-Burman Languages. Meithei, the state language of Manipur, shows significant points of contact with Kachin as well as with Kuki-Naga, though its affinities are predominantly with the latter (Benedict 1972:10). It is also spoken in some other places of India like Assam, Tripura, and in some countries such as Myanmar and Bangladesh. Manipuri is the only medium of communication among the speakers of the different tribal languages that mainly inhabit the hilly areas of Manipur. So, it is a lingua-franca of the state.

In Manipuri, a word can have different interpretations according to different contexts in which it occurs. Literally, ‘*pot*’ means ‘thing’. However, in certain contexts, the word *pot* has another interpretation that is different from its literal meaning. In that situation, the speaker and listener should have coordination about the situations where this word is used; otherwise, the meaning conveyed by *pot* may be wrongly interpreted due to the lack of coordination between the speaker and listener. So, to interpret the word *pot* according to the context of the conversation, there has to be a presupposition in which a presupposed item should be available through which it can be interpreted. Further, this word can be analyzed as general interpretation, positive connotation, and negative connotation.

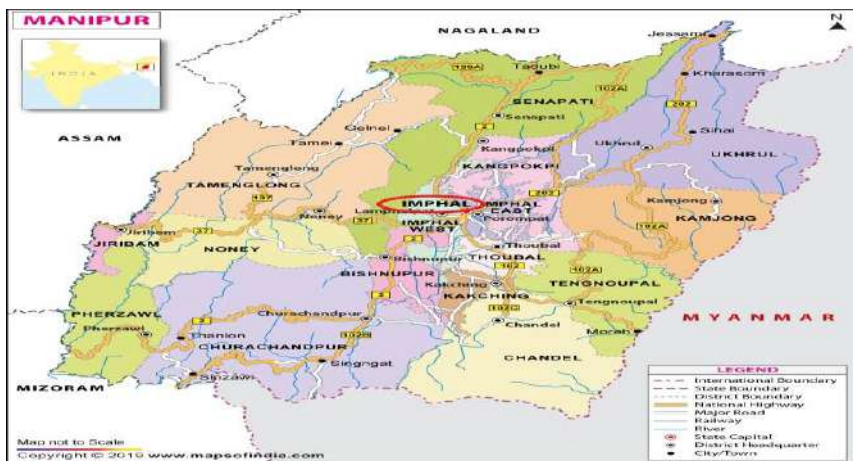


Fig. 1: Map of Manipur<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup><https://www.mapsofindia.com/maps/manipur/>



## 2. The objective of the study

The present study aims to explore the different usage of the lexical item *pot* which means 'thing' in English. The very interesting thing to investigate here is the connotative meaning given by this lexical item depending on different contexts. How this lexical item which can give various types of connotative meaning is used in different contexts is to be discussed in the present work. It also focuses on how it is interpreted depending on the context.

## 3. Research methodology

The data for the present study were collected through listening to the communicative events, narratives and also through the participant observation method. To collect data for the present study, conversation conducted among the youngsters and middle-aged people in different contexts was noted down because the lexical item *pot* which is emphasized here is mainly used by this group of people.

## 4. A general interpretation of *pot*

General interpretation means the literal meaning of the word *pot*. The literal meaning of *pot* is 'thing' in the sense that it specifies a referent represented by a noun which may be either animate or inanimate. It functions as a substitute item for a noun.

Lexical item	Denotative meaning	Connotative meaning
<i>pot</i>	'thing' (context-free)	'-----' (context dependent)

Table 1. denotative and connotative meaning of *pot*

- 1a. *pot-tu*                      *pu-rək-u*  
 thing-DET                      bring-DEIC-COM  
 'Bring the thing.'
- 1b. *p<sup>hi</sup>-du*                      *pu-rək-u*  
 cloth-DET                      bring-DEIC-COM  
 'Bring the cloth.' [connotative meaning of 1a]

2a. *ma-gi*            *pot-tu*            *pam-de*  
3SG-GEN            thing-DET            like-NEG  
'I don't like his thing.'

2b. *ma-gi*            *lai-du*            *pam-de*  
3SG-GEN            flower-DET            like-NEG  
'I don't like his flower.' [connotative meaning of 2a]

3a. *pot*    *p<sup>h</sup>ai-je*  
thing good-SAM  
'Thing is good.'

3b. *ju*    *p<sup>h</sup>ai-je*  
liquor good-SAM  
'Liquor is good.' [connotative meaning of 3a]

Here, *pot* is used as a substitute for the referent denoted by the noun. The *pot* in the example 1a, 2a, and 3a can be replaced by different nouns as in the sentences of 1b, 2b, and 3b respectively. In the above examples, the lexical item *pot* gives its general connotative (depending on the context) meaning which may be either in the positive or negative sentence.

However, if a speaker uses *pot* in a sentence, there should be a presupposition that can be understood by the listener. If the listener does not understand the connotative meaning of *pot* in a particular context, he cannot properly decode what is to be meant by the lexical item *pot*. To know its connotative meaning the listener needs to refer exophorically to the presupposed item through which it should be interpreted; otherwise, its use in the context should be meaningless. So, to make a proper interpretation of *pot* in the above examples the speaker has to let the listener know the referent it refers and the listener also needs to know the referent which is presupposed.

## 5. Positive connotation

The connotative meaning of *pot* implies a positive meaning in the sense that there is no awkward meaning in it. Its main application is regarding the emotional associations (personal or communal) which are suggested by or

are part of the meaning of, a linguistic unit, especially a lexical item (Crystal 2008, 102).

4. *pot*    *ləi-bə-rə*  
     thing    have-NMLZ-INT  
     'Do you have a thing?'

In the above example 4, the word *pot* is used in place of a noun which represents a referent of any entity. If the speaker does not like to mention the particular entity in a certain context, *pot* is used instead of that particular noun. On the part of the listener also, it has to be interpreted depending on the context.

- 5a. *ŋa*    *pu-rək-u*  
     fish    bring-DEIC-COM  
     'Bring the fish.'
- 5b. *pot*    *pu-rək-u*  
     thing    bring-DEIC-COM  
     'Bring the fish.' [lit. 'Bring the thing.']
- 6a. *ju*    *ləi-bə-rə*  
     liquor    have-NMLZ-INT  
     'Do you have liquor?'
- 6b. *pot*    *ləi-bə-rə*  
     thing    have-NMLZ-INT  
     'Do you have liquor?' [lit. 'Do you have thing?']
- 7a. *sel*    *ləi-bə-rə*  
     money    have-NMLZ-INT  
     'Do you have money?'
- 7b. *pot*    *ləi-bə-rə*  
     thing    have-NMLZ-INT  
     'Do you have money?' [lit. 'Do you have thing?']

Here the speaker uses *pot* because either s/he does not like to mention the things to others or s/he wants to keep the thing hidden not to let the others know rather than the listener. However, there should be coordination between the speaker and listener while using *pot* in conversation in the

sense that the listener should know the referent meant by *pot* the speaker refers to.

### 6. The connotation in a negative sentence

The word *pot* is used to give a connotative interpretation in the context of a negative sentence.

8. *pot-tu*            *ja-de*  
    thing-DET        agree-NEG  
    ‘The thing is not reliable.’
9. *ma-gi*            *pot-tu*            *canə-də-re*  
    3SG-GEN        thing-DET        match-NEG-PRF  
    ‘His thing is not matched.’
10. *mək<sup>h</sup>oi-gi*      *pot-tu*            *p<sup>h</sup>ə-tə-bə-ne*  
    3PL-GEN        thing-DET        good-NEG-NMLZ-COP  
    ‘Their things are not good.’

In these examples, the word ‘*pot*’ gives connotative meanings which are interpreted referring exophorically to the referent. It is the personal will of the speaker depending on the context. The sentences (8-10) can be used in a context that can be understood by both the speaker and listener. So, *pot* can refer to any kind of referent the speaker likes to refer.

### 7. The connotation in a positive sentence

In this context, the structure of the sentence is in a positive form in the sense that the sentence is assertive or declarative but the meaning given by *pot* has a negative connotation.

11. *pot*    *kap-pe*  
    thing    shoot-SAM  
    ‘The thing is nice.’ [lit. ‘The thing is shot.’]

Generally, the word *pot* is used in place of a noun (referring to an entity) that is not socially acceptable to use in the public domain. In the sentences in which the words related to something which cannot be used in the public domain and socially unaccepted words etc. are used, the word *pot* is used to minimize the unacceptability or informality to converse in the society or to make a formal speech accepted by society in conversation. If the *pot* is used in place of a noun like cloth, house, book, etc. it means they are extremely

nice and so on. However, if the *pot* is used in connection with a girl or a lady, it gives offensive meaning.

12a. *ju*    *lai-bə-ra*  
liquor have-NMLZ-INT  
'Do you have liquor?'

12b. *pot*    *lai-bə-rə*  
thing have-NMLZ-INT  
'Do you have liquor?' [lit. 'Do you have the thing?']

The word *ju* in the example 12a is replaced by *pot* as in example 12b. In Manipuri society, even though liquor is available everywhere, there is certain restriction to use liquor freely in day-to-day life. To avoid the use of the word *ju*, people use the lexical item *pot* to respect the societal restriction and also to be far away from the reach of the people who are against the use of liquor.

13. *pot-ki*            *nupi-ne*  
thing-GEN        woman-COP  
'She is a prostitute.' [lit. 'She is a woman of thing.']

In the context of example 13, *pot* means the woman who is a prostitute or who has a bad moral character. In such a situation, the exact term for prostitute is not used directly; another term like *pot* is used to indicate indirectly the person instead. It is not allowed to use certain words on formal occasions or public domain or in day-to-day life. The meanings conveyed by those words are offensive and not appropriate for that context. That is the reason why these words are not accepted publicly on certain occasions. These words are sometimes used as slang and if a person does not use such words properly, s/he is to be treated as an unruliness or indiscipline person who is very much against the societal norms. In short, some examples are also given below in which *pot* is used in place of some nouns.

14a. *drək lak-le*  
drug come-PRF  
'Drug has arrived.'

14b. *pot lak-le*

thing come-PRF

‘Drug has arrived.’ [lit. ‘Thing has arrived.’]

15a. *lamsa makon-ne*

prostitute place-COP

‘This is the place for prostitute.’

15b. *pot makon-ne*

thing place-COP

‘This is the place for prostitute.’ [lit. ‘This is the place of thing.’]

Furthermore, in some contexts, the word *pot* is used to indicate the speaker is not involved in that activity.

16. *nəŋ-gi pot əmə-tə sok-cə-de*

2SG-GEN thing one-only touch-REF-NEG

‘I don’t touch anything which is yours.’

17. *nəŋ-gi pot əmə-tə ləu-jə-de*

2SG-GEN thing one-only take-REF-NEG

‘I don’t take anything which is yours.’

18. *mə-ŋon-dəgi pot əmə-tə ləu-rək-te*

3SG-towards-ABL thing one-only take-DEIC-NEG

‘I don’t take anything from him.’

In examples 16, 17, and 18 the word *pot* is used to specify anything in that context. Mostly, such forms are used in a negative expression. In positive expression, it cannot be used as used in a negative environment. In these examples, *pot* indicates a noun representing a referent related to second and third persons. However, ‘*pot*’ is always followed by *əmətə* ‘one’ to add the extra meaning to *pot* as any kind of thing that s/he has.

### 8. Substituting various items by *pot*

The word *pot* can also be used to express different things in one form. It means that, in Meetei society, different traditional and ritual ceremonies are performed frequently. In such activities, various items are used to perform ritual ceremonies. In such contexts, we use the term *pot* to replace the various materials or things that are necessary to perform the ceremonies.

19. *pot*<sup>4</sup>-*siŋ-du*    *pu-t<sup>h</sup>ok-rək-u*  
 thing-PL-DET    bring-out-DEIC-COM  
 ‘Bring out the things.’

Here, example 16 shows that *pot* represents different things like rice, fruits, flowers, cloths, money, etc. which are necessary for the ceremony. In such a context of a conversation, *pot* is frequently used to substitute the whole thing with a single form. This form is mainly used in religious work, festivals, functions, etc., and is frequently used in Meetei society.

In the case of using the lexical item *pot* for various kinds of things, it is frequently used with another lexical item *cəi* meaning ‘stick’ as a component of a noun phrase. Here the lexical item *cəi* does not give its literal meaning. The noun phrase which is the combination of these two lexical items i.e. *pot cəi* gives the meaning of various kinds of things. If this phrase is used, there is a sense of a large number of things not a single item.

20. *pot cəi-siŋ-du* *məp<sup>h</sup>əm*        *ca-nə*        *t<sup>h</sup>əm-u*  
 thing-PL-DET    place        suit-ADV        keep-COM  
 ‘Keep all the things in the right place.’

The phrase *pot cəi* used in the above example is referring to any kind of thing which is available depending on the context of the conversation. It is to be interpreted by the listener with the help of the presupposed item referred by the same phrase. So, the use of this is very context-dependent. Without having a proper understanding of the context, it should be difficult to give an interpretation of this phrase.

### 9. *pot* as a polysemous word

In semantics, polysemy is the term that is used to mean the words which can give different meanings without changing their form. It can mean any kind of thing according to the context. It is not a self-contained meaning

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<sup>4</sup> In the context of ritual ceremonies, *pot* refers to all the items needed for the ceremony.

word because without context it cannot give a particular meaning. So, its meaning is very vague and it can be properly interpreted only with a combination of context.

21. *pot-tu*                      *pu-rək-pə-rə*  
 thing-DET    bring-DEIC-NMLZ-INT  
 ‘Have you brought the thing?’

When a speaker says this kind of sentence using the lexical item *pot*, any listener cannot understand what the speaker is trying to mean. It cannot give a very specific meaning because it is a polysemous word. So, if a speaker likes to use this lexical item there should be a context understood by the listener. Once the context is understood by the listener, it can be very easily interpreted.

If there is a context in which two speakers are talking about a gift which is to be presented to their friend in front of him/her and they also like to surprise him/her, the lexical item *pot* can be used in place of the gift and the listener also can easily interpret it. Since the presupposed item is understood only by the two speakers in this context, the third participant (to whom the gift is to be given) cannot understand what is meant by the lexical item *pot* in the conversation.

22. *pot-tu*                      *pu-rək-pə-rə*  
 thing-DET    bring-DEIC-NMLZ-INT  
 ‘Have you brought the gift?’ [lit. ‘Have you brought the thing?’]

In this context, the lexical item *pot* can be interpreted by the listener who knows the presupposed item very well. So, to have a proper interpretation of *pot*, the context has to be very specific because it is a polysemous word. If it is not used under a particular context, it should be wrongly interpreted.

### 10. Conclusion

In Manipuri, *pot* is exhaustively used in day-to-day conversation as well as in formal speech. The ‘*pot*’ is used as a substitute item for other words. It substitutes another word that is not socially accepted not to be an informal speech. Sometimes, *pot* is used in place of another word that is not allowed



to use in the public domain. It is to be used as a context-dependent word so that the listener can easily interpret the lexical item *pot* in its correct form because it is a polysemous word. And it is widely and frequently used in many domains of conversation in Manipuri society.

### Abbreviation

2	second person	INT	interrogative
3	third person	NEG	negative
ADV	adverb	NMLZ	nominalizer
COM	command	PL	plural
COP	copula	PRF	perfective
DEIC	deictic	SAM	simple aspect marker
DET	determiner	SG	singular
GEN	genitive	REFL	reflexive

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## Verbal Suffixes of Mao

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### Abstract

*Mao is a language of the Naga-Kuki groups of Tibeto-Burman language family and spoken mainly in Senapati District, the northern part of Manipur. The speaker of Mao language is known as Mao. In this paper, an attempt will be made to give a description of the verbal suffixes of Mao. The verbal suffixes are those suffixes which are attached to the verbal roots indicating the aspect as well as temporal frame of the action or event. There are various forms of verbal suffixes in Mao i.e. in the case of tense, aspect, mood, negative, imperative, interrogative, adverbial. In the aspect markers, there are four (4) forms of suffixes e.g. -e indicates simple aspect, -we 'imperfective aspect', -re 'perfective aspect', -le 'unrealised aspect'. The suffix -ni is used as mood marker. In the negative, the suffix -mo indicates negative marker. In an imperative sentence, there are two verbal suffixes i.e. -lo 'command' and -so 'prohibitive'. The marker -tio indicates the let imperative. The suffix -pio gives the meaning of wish or blessing. In an interrogative sentence, the suffix -ma is used as the interrogative marker. The adverbial suffix -so is used as adverbial marker in Mao.*

**Keywords:** Aspect, Mood, Negative, Imperative, Interrogative, Adverb.

### 1. Introduction

Mao is a small tribe inhabiting in the Senapati district, the northern part of Manipur. Mao is a name which means both the people and language. It is 104 km far away from Imphal by road on the National Highway Number 2. The village is bounded by the Angami, Rengma and Chakhesang Naga tribe

of Nagaland in the North and the Maram and Zeme Naga tribe in the west, the Tangkhul Naga in the east and the Meitei in the south of Manipur. Ethno-culturally, Mao is attached with the Nagas of Nagaland being closely related to the Angami Nagas ( P.P.Giridhar 1994).

Some scholars observed that Mao is included in the Naga-Kuki group of Tibeto-Burman language family by G.A Grierson (1903). Benedict P.K (1972) described, Mao belongs to the Naga group of Sino-Tibetan language family. Robert Shafer (1974) also describes, Mao as in the Luhupa unit in the Eastern Branch under the Old kukish section of Burmic division of Sino-Tibetan. According to Scott DeLancey (1987), Mao belongs to the Naga group under the Assam-Burmese section of the Tibeto-Burman family. George Van Driem, in his book ‘Languages of the Himalayas; An Ethnolinguistic Handbook of the Greater Himalayan Region (2001)’, describes the Mao language as one of the Angami-Pochuri languages, classified as an independent branch of the Tibeto-Burman languages.

There are lots of dialect variations in tones, lexeme and pronunciation among the Mao villages, suggesting a lack of interaction in the past. There is language variation with the neighbouring language groups such as the Poumai and Angami but they can be mutually intelligible.

## **2. Origin**

The Maos are an indigenous group of people belonging to the Mongoloid race, inhabiting the hilly region of North Eastern India and regions between Brahmaputra River and the Chindwin River in Myanmar. They are a very distinct group and one of the finest races in this part of the region. Most of the writers of the Naga tribe are of the opinion that the Nagas had come from different places of South East Asian countries and Islands at different times. This is one of the factors to this fact Mao tribe have cultural similarities with South East Asian people. G.A Grierson (1903) has pointed out that the origin of the Mao is based on their language. Linguistically, he assigned the Mao Language to belong to the Tibeto-Burman language family. In his observation, the Mao groups came with the second wave of

migration from North Western China between the upper water of the Yangtse-Kiang and Hoang-Ho rivers.

According to Oral tradition, the Mao Naga tribe is believed to have originated from Makhel, the ancestral place of the Mao which is few miles away from the National highway 02 below Tadubi, Manipur. The Makhel of Mao village holds a central place in Naga tradition in connection with a belief that the Nagas at one point of time settled here and later dispersed to their present areas of habitation, but not before erecting monuments that would signify their communion and a pledge to reunite in the future. The sacred Wild Pear Tree, standing at Shajouba at Makhel is believed to have been planted of migration of the Nagas. The actual report on the origin and migration of the Maos, however, cannot be established because of the lack of written documents. So, the history of Mao is based on the oral folk tales, songs, stories, legends, proverbs which are transmitted from one generation to another.

### **3. Review of Literature**

The Mao is one of the major Naga tribes of Manipur. More than thirty-three (33) Tibeto-Burman languages are found in Manipur (Singh, Yashwanta Ch. 2002). Out of these languages a few of them have been officially recognised. There are a few written works on Mao language i.e. ‘Mao Naga Grammar’ by P.P.Giridhar (1994). In his work, he discussed: the phonology, morphology and syntax respectively. Another work on Mao language is ‘Mao phonology’ a dissertation paper under Manipur University by Th. Jamuna Devi (1991). In her dissertation, she discussed only phonology. Daniel. M (2008), had written about the ‘Socio-cultural and religious life of Mao Naga Tribe’. In his book, the concept of good life which is based on traditional Mao thought and the religion, and also their moral belief are mentioned. Dr. R.K. Ranjit Singh & Dr. Lorho Mary Maheo (2010), also have written about the ‘The Mao Naga: An Ethnographic Study’; have described about the Mao culture, tradition, social background and customs. In their book, the ethnographic background of the people, social life and their economic condition are briefly drawn.

#### **4. Objective**

The objective of this paper is to examine and identify the verbal suffixes of Mao. Mao is not a pronominalized language unlike Kuki languages which are typically pronominalized. This work will also be useful to the native speakers and those people who are involved in linguistic research, language teaching and research works.

#### **5. Verbal suffixes**

In agglutinative languages, the number of verbal suffixes is more than that of the nominal suffixes. In this language verbal suffixes play an important role. The verbal suffixes are those suffixes which are attached to the verbal roots when these suffixes are added to the verb; it denotes an action, event and process etc. In Mao, the various forms of verbal suffixes are found in the forms of tense, aspect, mood, negative, imperative, interrogative, adverbial. They are discussed below.

#### **6. Tense**

Tense is the grammatical expression of the relation of the time of an event to some reference point in time, usually the moment the clause is uttered. The distinction of tense into past and present is absent in Mao. In this language, the only tense distinction grammatically is between future and non-future. The future is marked by the suffix *-le* and non-future is unmarked.

##### **6.1 Future**

The verb form for the non-future tense is unmarked and futurity is indicated by the future marker *-le*. The suffix *-le* is added to the verbal root.

- (1) *əi ijo delihi tale*
- |     |       |           |        |
|-----|-------|-----------|--------|
| əi  | ijo   | delhi-hi  | ta-le  |
| 1SG | today | Delhi-LOC | go-FUT |
- I will go to delhi today.

- (2) *aitaməi pfoye sidu kadele*  
 ʔitaməi pfo-ye sidu kade-le  
 1SG 3SG-ACC tomorrow meet-FUT  
 We will meet him tomorrow.
- (3) *əi ni-ye cithukahe ʔthi-hikade-le*  
 əi ni-ye cithu kahe ʔthi-hi kade-le  
 I you-ACC month two after-LOC meet-FUT  
 I will meet you after two months.

### 6.2 Aspect Markers:

Aspect indicates the internal structure of an event or situation. It is not concerned with relating the time of the situation to any other time point but rather with the internal temporal constituency of the one situation. Holt (1943) says ‘aspects are a different way of viewing the internal temporal constituency of a situation’.

An event or a situation can be divided into four units

- (a) simple expression of the event.
- (b) expression the event is going on.
- (c) expression the event is completed and
- (d) the event of expression will be performed in the next moment.

There are four (4) forms of aspect markers in Mao. They are,

Table 1: Aspect markers in Mao

Simple Aspect	-e
Imperfective Aspect	-we
Perfective Aspect	-re
Unrealised Aspect	-le

### 6.2.1 Simple Aspect

The simple aspect is formed by adding simple aspect marker ‘-e’ to the verbal roots and it gives the simple statement.

- (4) *əi k<sup>h</sup>oto toe*  
 əi k<sup>h</sup>oto to-e  
 1SG rice eat-SAP  
 I eat rice.

- (5) *utono opro toe*  
 uto-no opro to-e  
 cow-NOM grass eat-SAP  
 The cow eats the grasses.

### 6.2.2 Imperfective Aspect

An imperfective aspect expresses the action of continuity. In Mao, it is formed by adding imperfective marker ‘-we’ to the verbal roots.

- (6) *pfono ləirər p<sup>h</sup>rowe.*  
 pfo-no ləirər p<sup>h</sup>ro-we.  
 3SG-NOM book read-IPFV  
 He is reading the book.

- (7) *əino k<sup>h</sup>oto towe.*  
 əi-no k<sup>h</sup>oto to-we.  
 1SG-NOM rice eat-IPFV  
 I am eating rice.

### 6.2.3 Perfective Aspect

Perfective aspect expresses the action is completed. The perfect marker ‘-re’ is affixed to the verb roots.

- (8) *əi skul tare*  
 əi skul ta-re  
 1SGSchool go-PFV  
 I have gone to school.

- (9) *pfo olo sore*  
 pfo                      olo      so-re  
 3SG              song      sing-PFV  
 He has sung a song.

#### 6.2.4 Unrealised Aspect

Unrealised aspect is used for more hypothetical situations, including situations that represent inductive generalizations and also predictions about the future (C.F. Comrie, 1985; 45). In Mao, suffix ‘-le’ is directly added to the verbal root to denote unrealised aspect. This is used for action which will take place in the near future.

- (10) *əi ləirərɕihi tale.*  
 əi              ləirərɕi-hi      ta-le.  
 1SG              school-DET      go-UNRL  
 I will go to school.

- (11) *əi sidu bazərhi tale.*  
 əi              sidu              bazər-hi              ta-le.  
 1SG              tomorrow              market-DET      go-UNRL  
 I will go to market tomorrow.

#### 7. Mood

It denotes the mode or manner in which a statement is made by the verb. The suffix ‘-ni’ which is affixed to the verb to indicate the desire or wish.

- (12) *əi kəkurnie.*  
 əi      kəkur-ni-e  
 1SG      play-MD-SAP  
 I want to play.

- (13) *əi ləirər p<sup>h</sup>ronie.*  
 əi      ləirər      p<sup>h</sup>ro-ni-e  
 1SG      book      read-MD-SAP  
 I like to read a book.



In the above example shows that the mood marker always attached to the verb and followed by simple aspect marker.

### 8. Negative Marker

Negative is a word expressing the act of denying a particular statement and absence of any quality of positive meaning. The negative is formed by adding the negative marker ‘-mo’ which is directly added to the verbal root.

(14) *pfo ca soremo.*  
 pfo ca so-re-mo.  
 3SG tea drink-PFV-NEG  
 He has not drink tea.

(15) *aitamäi ujewemo.*  
 äitamäi uje-we-mo.  
 1PL sleep-IPFV-NEG  
 We are not sleeping.

### 9. Imperative Marker

Imperative mood is used to express order, commands, respect and instruction. It indicates the speakers desire to influence future action. There are two forms of imperative markers.

(a) The marker ‘-lo’ indicates the command

(b) The marker ‘-so’ indicates the prohibitive marker.

Example of -lo:

(16) *tolo*  
 to-lo  
 eat-COMD  
 (You) Eat.

(17) *kralo*  
 kra-lo  
 cry-COMD  
 (You) Cry.

Example of *-so*:

(18) *tasō*  
ta-so  
go-PROH  
Don't go.

(19) *krasō*  
kra-so  
cry-PROH  
Don't cry.

### 10. Let imperative

The suffix *-tio* is the let imperative marker in the language and indicates the action which is to happen in near future.

(20) *əitaməi k<sup>h</sup>oto totio*  
əitaməi                      k<sup>h</sup>oto to-tio  
we                      rice      eat-SUGG  
Let us eat rice.

(21) *əitaməi cə sotio*  
əitaməi                      cə      so-tio  
we      tea      drink-SUGG  
Let us drink tea.

(22) *əitaməi p<sup>h</sup>rotio*  
əitaməi                      p<sup>h</sup>ro-tio  
we                      read-SUGG  
Let us read.

### 11. Wish imperative

Wish imperative is constructed through the suffixation of wish marker '*-pio*' to the verbal roots or stems.

(23) *oraməino niye sihrapio*  
oraməi-no      ni-ye                      sihra-pio  
God-NOM      2SG-ACC                      bless-WISH  
May God bless you!

- (24) *pfono niye lisepio*  
 pfo-no                      ni-ye                      lise-pio  
 3SG-NOM      2SG-ACC              love-WISH  
 May he love you!

## 12. Interrogative Marker

In an interrogative sentence in Mao, the question marker ‘-ma’ is attached to the verbal root in Yes/No question not in ‘Wh’ question.

- (25) *ni olo soma*  
 ni      olo      so-ma  
 2SG    song    sing-Q  
 Can you sing a song?

- (26) *pfo k<sup>h</sup>oto to-ma*  
 pfo    k<sup>h</sup>oto    to-ma  
 3SG    rice      eat-Q  
 Does he eat rice?

In the example (27) and (28) shows that the question marker ‘-ma’ is not present in ‘Wh’ or direct question sentences in Mao.

- (27) *ni ləirər kəne ijəpa-e*  
 ni      ləirər    kəne    ijəpa-e  
 you    book    which   like-SA  
 Which book do you like?

- (28) *ni-ji ədi t<sup>h</sup>i-koe*  
 ni-ji                      ədi      t<sup>h</sup>i-koe  
 2SG-GEN              what    name-COP  
 What is your name?

### 13. Adverbial Marker

An adverb is a word which generally qualifies a verb, an adjective or another adverb; but it also qualifies a sentence or any part of speech except, a noun and a pronoun.

In Mao, adverb is formed by suffixation of adverbial marker ‘-so’ to the verbal root.

(29) *pfo kot<sup>h</sup>oso tae*  
 pfo kot<sup>h</sup>o-so ta-e  
 3SG quick-ADV go-SAP  
 He goes quickly.

(30) *pfo ləirərcihi kraso tae*  
 pfo ləirərci-hi kra-so ta-e  
 3SG school-DET cry-ADV go-SAP  
 He goes cryingly to the school.

### 14. Conclusion

From the above discussion, it is clearly found that the Mao has lot of verbal suffixes. In agglutinative languages, the verbal suffixes play an important role. The various forms of verbal suffixes are found in the forms of tense, aspect, mood, negative, imperative, let imperative, wish imperative, interrogative and adverbial marker respectively. In the aspect markers, there are four (4) forms of suffixes e.g. -e indicates simple aspect, -we ‘imperfective aspect’, -re ‘perfective aspect’, -le ‘unrealised aspect’. The suffix -ni is used as mood marker. In the negative, the suffix -mo indicates negative marker. In an imperative sentence, there are two verbal suffixes i.e. -lo ‘command’ and -so ‘prohibitive’. The marker -tio indicates the let imperative. The suffix -pio gives the meaning of wish or blessing. In an interrogative sentence, the suffix -ma is used as the interrogative marker. The adverbial suffix -so is used as adverbial marker in Mao. The verbal suffix falls within a list that is exhaustive, expressing certain grammatical values. This is the initial stage of exploring the structure of this language. It is necessary to do a further in-depth analysis.

**Abbreviation:**

1	First Person
2	Second Person
3	Third Person
ACC	Accusative
ADV	Adverb
COP	Copula
COMD	Command
DET	Determiner
FUT	Future
IPFV	Imperfective
MD	Mood
NEG	Negative
NOM	Nominative
PL	Plural
PROH	Prohibitive
PFV	Perfective
Q	Question Marker
SAP	Simple Aspect
SG	Singular
UNRL	Unrealised Aspect

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## Negative Construction in Nambashi: An Endangered Language of Manipur<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

*The present paper deals with the study of negation in Nambashi, an endangered language mainly spoken in the Ukhrul district of Manipur. It is the exonym which could mean the community as well as the name of the language. It is one of the dialects of Tangkhul<sup>2</sup>. The present study is based on a small village called Langthungching which is 7km from the capital city, Imphal inhabited by around 2000 people with 115 houses. Nambashi is used in a restricted environment. The major language, Tangkhul is used in writing any form of literary work using Roman script. Negation in Nambashi is mainly formed by the suffixation to the verb. The various negative particles which are used in forming negation in Nambashi are /-mə/, /- məŋ/, /-mai/ and /-jo/ etc. This is a small aspect which may be helpful in the study of morpho-syntax of the language. There are few works on this language and its literature is mainly based on oral literature. Hence, the step is taken as a part of language documentation program.*

**Keywords:** *Lingua-franca, morpho-syntax, post-verbal, Tibeto-Burman.*

### 1.Introduction

Nambashi<sup>3</sup> is the exonym of language and community. It is one of the endangered languages of the state which has no scripts of its own. It is mainly spoken in Kamjong<sup>4</sup> district of Manipur with Kasom Khullen as its sub-Division. Few works have been found in this language done by some scholars as Devi (2013:62-71), 2016, Nameirakpam (2013:143-150), Hyongyo (2016:91-150). It is a Tibeto-Burman (Tangkhul-Naga sub-Group) language. However, it is not ascertained according to the classification made by Grierson (1903) and Benedict (1972). It is related to

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<sup>1</sup>This is an extended version of the paper with the same title which was presented in 47<sup>th</sup> All India Conference of Dravidian Linguists and International Symposium on Language Endangerment organized by Dravidian Linguistic Association of India, International School of Dravidian Linguistics and Central University of Karnataka, Kalaburagi from 20<sup>th</sup>- 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2019 held at Central University of Karnataka.

<sup>2</sup> Tangkhul is the standard variety while Nambashi is a sub-standard one.

<sup>3</sup> Locally it is known as Dardouy but popularly known as Nambashi which was coined by the British Government. How it is named could be found in Devi (2016).

<sup>4</sup> Earlier it was under Ukhrul district, but after the demarcation on Dec 8, 2016, Nambashi is included under Kamjong district.

Khulmul sub-tribe of Maring, Sarbung, Sorbe and Khambi language. Tangkhul, the standard variety is used as the medium of communication among the neighboring villages. Fishman (1991) claimed that the considered factor in evaluating the vitality of a language is whether or not it is being transmitted from one generation to the next. Language endangerment can be ranked on a continuum from stability to extinct. Even “safe” (below) however, does not guarantee language vitality because the speaker or speakers may cease to pass on their language to the next generation. According to the *UNESCO’s Program on Languages* (2001), six degrees of endangerment of language can be mentioned with regards to Intergenerational Language Transmission as shown in Table below:

<b>Degree of endangerment</b>	<b>Condition</b>
<b>Safe (6)</b>	The language is spoken by all generations. There is no sign of linguistic threat from any other language, and the intergenerational transmission of the language seems uninterrupted.
<b>Stable yet threatened (5)</b>	The language is spoken in most contexts by all generations with unbroken intergenerational transmission, yet multilingualism in the native language and one or more dominant language(s) has usurped certain important communication contexts. Note that multilingualism alone is not necessarily a threat to languages.
<b>Unsafe (4)</b>	Most but not all children or families of a particular community speak their language as their first language, but it may be restricted to specific social domains (such as at home where children interact with their parents and grandparents).
<b>Definitively endangered (3)</b>	The language is no longer being learned as the mother tongue by children in the home. The youngest speakers are thus of the parental generation. At this stage, parents may still speak their language to their children, but their children do not typically respond in the language.
<b>Severely endangered (2)</b>	The language is spoken only by grandparents and older generations; while the parent generation may still understand the language, they typically do not speak it to their children.
<b>Critically endangered (1)</b>	The youngest speakers are in the great-grandparental generation, and the language is not used for everyday interactions. These older people often remember only part of the language but do not use it, since there may not be anyone to speak with.
<b>Extinct (0)</b>	There is no one who can speak or remember the language.

Hence, by observing the above criteria, the present condition of Nambashi lies between Unsafe and definitively endangered because it is restricted to specific domain like home and it is not learned as the mother tongue by the children because they prefer to study Tangkhul which is the standard variety.



As a part of a typological study, the phoneme inventory of the language is not yet defined linguistically. It shares some of the features of Tibeto-Burman language such as agglutinating, SOV<sup>5</sup> word order, and presence of velar nasal /ŋ/ in the initial position of word, tone etc. During the data collection on negation, it is observed that Nambashi verbs are not inflected (when suffix are attached) when the time of the action is changed. As for instance,

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <p>a.     <i>kəi-un-skul-re-si-wiŋ.ŋe</i><br/>         I-today-school-LOC-go-ASP<br/>         ‘Today I go to school’</p>                | <p>b.     <i>kəi-un-skul-re-si-məŋ.ŋe</i><br/>         I-today-school-LOC-go-NEG<br/>         ‘I don’t go to school today’</p>                 |
| <p>c.     <i>kəi-mi.jan-skul-re-si-wiŋ.ŋe</i><br/>         I-yesterday-school-LOC-go-ASP<br/>         ‘I went to school yesterday’</p>  | <p>d.     <i>kəi-mi.jan-skul-re-si-məŋ.ŋe</i><br/>         I-yesterday-school-LOC-go-NEG<br/>         ‘Yesterday, I didn’t go to school’</p>   |
| <p>e.     <i>kəi-mə.sun-skul-re-si-wiŋ.ŋe</i><br/>         I-tomorrow-school-LOC-go-ASP<br/>         ‘I will go to school tomorrow’</p> | <p>f.     <i>kəi-mə.sun-skul-re-si-ru-məŋ.ŋe</i><br/>         I-tomorrow-school-LOC-go-NEG<br/>         ‘I will not go to school tomorrow’</p> |

From the above three examples, it is observed that verb doesn’t reflect or change its structure in different construction. In other word, it can be said that tense is used to indicate the time of action and aspect is used to indicate how the action is performed. If tense is present in the language, the verb *si* in the above sentences will be different (for today, yesterday and tomorrow). This shows the presence of aspect instead of tense.

## 2. Negation

According to Crystal (1993: 231), negation is a process or construction in grammatical and semantic analysis which typically expresses the contradiction of a sentence’s meaning. The expression of negation in the world’s languages may entail either the addition of a free morpheme or a bound morpheme to a proposition or a verb, with the intention of reversing the truth-value of that proposition. As Trask (1993: 179) observed, the expression of negation varies widely among languages because the negative morphemes sometimes may or may not affect the verb. For instance,

Present tense- third person singular

<b>Present Positive</b>	<b>Present Progressive Negative</b>
-------------------------	-------------------------------------

He goes	He is <b>not</b> going
---------	------------------------

She dies	she is <b>not</b> dying
----------	-------------------------

This is the case which shows those verbs are not affected by negative morpheme.

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<sup>5</sup> S= Subject; O= Object; V= Verb

**2.1 Scope of Negation:** The role of negation in a language helps to determine the implication given to the verb, resulting in understanding the morpho-syntactic nature of the language. From the data collection, it is observed that every negative marker follows the verb, hence it is post-verbal (see the examples below). For instance,

(1) *kəi- t<sup>h</sup>ə.bəg-kə.təm- mu.ni-ru- muŋ.ŋe<sup>6</sup>*

I-work (N) - work (V) -able-NEG-ASP

‘I may not be able to do the work’

(2) *kəi-t<sup>h</sup>ə.bəg-ki-kə.təm-ru-muŋ.ŋe*

I-work (N)-DET-work (V)-NEG-ASP

‘I won’t do the work’

(3) *kəi-t<sup>h</sup>ə.bəg-kə.təm-ru-muŋ.ŋe*

I-work (N)-work (V)-NEG-ASP

‘I don’t do the work’

(4) *kəi-t<sup>h</sup>ə.bəg-kə.təm-kə.ni-ru-muŋ.ŋe*

I-work (N)-work (V)-could-NEG-ASP

‘I couldn’t do the work’

(5) *kəi-ka.duk-muŋ.ŋe-kəi-t<sup>h</sup>ə.bəg-kə.təm-kə.ni-nuŋ-tiŋ.ŋe*

I-think-SA (negative)-I-work (N)-work (V)-could-UND-SA (positive)

‘I don’t think I could do the work’

(6) *kəi-ka.duk-tiŋ.ŋe-kəi-t<sup>h</sup>ə.bəg-ki-kə.təm-kə.ni-ru-muŋ.ŋe*

I-think-SA (positive)-I-work (N)- DET-work (V)-could-NEG-SA

‘I think I couldn’t do the work’

In the above example, it is seen that negation scopes syntactically over the verb and semantically over the clause. All these sentences express negation in different environments.

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<sup>6</sup> Abbreviations used in the paper are ACC= Accusative; SA= Simple Aspect; COP= Copula; IMP= Imperative; INT= Interrogative; LNEG= Let Negative; LOC= Locative; N= Noun; NEG= Negative; NEG-INT= Negative Interrogative; NEG-STR= Negative Strengthening; PRO= Progressive; UND= Undefined; UNR= Unrealized; V= Verb

## 2.2 Positioning of Negative particles in Nambashi

It is found that negative suffixes are mainly attached to the verb root. According to the various constructions there can be various negative particles.

Example:

- (7) *kəi-bu-sa-mə- əŋ.ŋe<sup>7</sup>*  
 I-rice-eat-NEG-ASP  
 ‘I do not eat rice’
- (8) *kəi-mə-re-pam-məŋ.ŋe*  
 I-He-ACC-like-NEG-ASP  
 ‘I do not like him’
- (9) *kəi-mən-rəm-si-nə-məŋ.ŋe*  
 I-he/she-LOC-go-want-NEG-ASP  
 ‘I do not want to go to his place’

### 2.2.1 Negative Copula

The negative copula /*mai*/ is used in the language. For instance,

- (10) *mə.wi- dok.tər-re*  
 he/she- doctor- COP  
 ‘He/she is a doctor’
- (11) *mə.wi- dok.tər-mai*  
 He/she - doctor-NEG  
 ‘He/she is not a doctor’
- (12) *tombə -bu-kə-ə.re*  
 Tomba -rice - cook-PRO  
 ‘Tomba is cooking the food’
- (13) *tombə- bu-ər-mai*  
 Tomba -rice-cook-NEG  
 ‘Tomba doesn’t cook the food’

---

<sup>7</sup> In most of the written form *məŋ.ŋe* is used but in spoken form *əŋ.ŋe* is also acceptable.

The negative particle /mai/ is again used in the complex structure attached to the main clause as shown below

- (14) *um.pa- huk-.lai- ə.mə-t<sup>h</sup>ə.bək-mə.ci-mai*  
 Father-arrives-CON-3<sup>rd</sup> Person-job-finish-NEG  
 ‘When father arrives, he doesn’t finish the work’

### 2.2.2 Negative Prohibitive

For the construction of negative prohibitive, the suffix /-ma/ and /-ə/ are used. For Example,

- (15) *ui.pa-rə- ni.ki-su-ma*  
 Elder-LOC-leg-kick-NEG  
 ‘Do not kick the elder’

- Or, *ui.pə-rə- ni.ki -kau-ma-ə*  
 Elder-LOC- leg- kick-NEG-IMP  
 ‘Do not kick the elders’

- (16) *in-re- kə.t<sup>h</sup>ij.bo-hu-ma-ə*  
 House-LOC-late-return-NEG-IMP  
 ‘Do not come late at home’

### 2.2.3 Let Negation

/-jo/ is the marker or the suffix used in the construction of let negation which is added after the negative marker /-mai/. For Example,

- (17) *in.nə- ni.sa- si.in-mai-jo*  
 We- drugs- use-NEG-LNEG  
 ‘Let us not use drugs’
- (18) *in.nə- on.jo- bə.ʃar-re-si-mai-jo*  
 We- today- market-LOC- go-NEG-LNEG  
 ‘Let us not go to the market today’

### 2.2.4 Negative Question

/mok təm.me/ is the marker for negative question. It is composed of two parts- /mok/ (to indicate negation) and /təm.me/ (to refer interrogative).

For simple interrogative and simple sentence, it looks in the manner as shown below:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <p>(19)a. <i>mə- Tombə- təm.me?</i><br/>He-Tomba-INT<br/>'Is he Tomba?'</p>           | <p>b. <i>mə-tombə-e</i><br/>he-tomba-PAR<br/>'He is Tomba'</p>             |
| <p>(20)a. <i>mə-tombə-mək-təm.me?</i><br/>He-Tomba-NEG-INT<br/>'Is he not Tomba?'</p> | <p>b. <i>mə-tombə-mək-e</i><br/>he-tomba-NEG-PAR<br/>'He is not Tomba'</p> |
- Again,
- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <p>(21)a. <i>mə-cu.rup-kə.jup-təm.me?</i><br/>He-cigarette-smoke-INT<br/>'Does he smoke?'</p>  | <p>b. <i>mə-cu.rup-kə.jup-e</i><br/>he-cigarette-smoke-PAR<br/>'He smokes'</p> |
| <p>(22)a. <i>mə-cu.rup-mə.jup-təm.me?</i><br/>He-cigarette-NEG-INT<br/>'Doesn't he smoke?'</p> | <p>b. <i>mə-cu.rup-təm.me?</i><br/>he-cigarette-INT<br/>'Does he smoke?'</p>   |

### 2.2.5 Negative Strengthening

Negative is strengthened by adding some additional words in language. It gives the emphasis that the action will not be performed. In Nambashi, it is strengthened by adding the morpheme /*sup.nə*/ before the verb as shown below:

- (23) *kəi-men-rəm-sup.nə-si-məŋ*  
I-he/she-LOC-NEG-STR-go-SA  
'I will never go to his place'
- (24) *kəi- mə-re-sup.nə-nuŋ.si-məŋ.ŋe*  
I-He-ACC-NEG-STR-love-SA  
'I never love him'
- (25) *kəi-ju- sup.nə-kə.jup.ruŋ-məŋ.ŋe*  
I-beer- NEG-STR-drink-other-ASP  
'I will never drink any beer'

### 2.2.6 Double Negation

It is formed as shown below:

(26 ) a. *kəi-sa-ru-məŋ.ŋe*  
 I-eat-NEG-UNR  
 ‘I will not eat’

b. *kəi-un-də.t<sup>h</sup>əu-sa-ru-məŋ.ŋe*  
 I-today-any-eat-NEG-UNR  
 ‘I will not eat any other food’

### 2.2.7 Quantifier Negation

Many quantifiers such as many, lot, some, few etc are used in the construction to determine the quantity but when the existence of the quantifier is neglected, it comes under the quantifier negation. In Nambashi, it is observed as follows-

(27) *cu.ta.mə- ui- kə.t<sup>h</sup>ətpo-kə.se*  
 Somebody- dog-kill-Past-ASP  
 ‘Somebody killed our dog’

(28) *cu.nə- ken-ui-t<sup>h</sup>ə.tət-po-mai*  
 Somebody-your-dog -kill-Past-NEG  
 ‘Somebody didn’t kill our dog’

(29) *mə.sun-jəŋ.kəi.mə- suk-nu.me*  
 Tomorrow-something one-happen  
 ‘Something will happen tomorrow’

(30) *mə.sun - jəŋ.rəu.nə- suk-ruŋ-mai*  
 Tomorrow- happen- one-other-NEG  
 ‘Nothing will happen tomorrow’

### 2.2.8 Existential Negation

It is used to reject the concept of existence. It could be an idea, or object, person etc. It is observed as follows:

(31) *win.rəipar- k<sup>h</sup>et-əm.mə*  
 Here-flower-one- ASP  
 ‘Here is a flower’

(32) *win-rəi.par-mai*  
 Here-flower-NEG  
 ‘Here is not a flower’

(33) *mə-win- əm.me*  
 He- here-ASP  
 ‘He is here’

- (34) *win-di-mə-mai*  
 Here-LOC-he-NEG  
 ‘He is not here’

### 2.3 Formation of opposite words

There is no exact formula for double negative formation but it seem from the given example below the sound of the second syllable tends to retain its form when negatives are derived.

<u>Words</u>	<u>Gloss</u>	<u>Opposite</u>	<u>Gloss</u>
kə.sa	‘to eat’	sa.mok	‘not eaten’
kə.in	‘to sleep’	in.mok	‘didn’t sleep’
kət.ca	‘to die’	kriŋ	‘alive’
kə.nan	‘clean’	tiŋ	‘unclean’
kə.siŋ	‘wise’	moŋ	‘unwise’
kar.saŋ	‘tall’	kar.nim	‘short’
kar.ʃəŋ	‘pure’	kə.bur	‘impure’
kə.t <sup>h</sup> uk	‘to hide’	mə.t <sup>h</sup> uk.mok	‘not hidden’
kə.ʃək	‘to write’	mə.ʃuk.mok	‘unwritten’
kə.suk	‘declare’	suk.mai	‘undeclared’
kə.woi (Female)	‘dress’	kə.woi.mək	‘undress’
kə.na	‘sick’	na.mok	‘well’
kə.mu	‘seen’	mu.mok	‘unseen’
kə.ru	‘to steal’	mə.ru.mai	‘didn’t steal’
kə.bəp	‘to beat someone’	bəp.mai	‘unbeaten’
kə.par	‘to bloom’	par.mok	‘not bloom’

### 3. Conclusion

There are so many things to do since it is an undocumented language in various fields. The grammar of the language has not been studied yet. The language is on the verge of extinction as it is not taught or learnt as a formal language. Most of the literary works are written in *Tangkhul*, the major language. The people use Roman script in their work. The present study only focuses on the negative construction in Nambashi which shows that negative constructions lies in the suffixation to the verb root. The studies show that Nambashi has aspect instead of tense since there is no change in the verb in different constructions. Finally, the following markers are found in the construction of negation as-

/-mə/ and /-məŋ/	-	‘Simple Negative’
/-ma/ or /-ma.ə/	-	‘Negative Prohibitive’
/-jo/	-	‘Let Negation’
/-mok təm.me/	-	‘Negative Question’
/-sup.nə/	-	‘Negative Strengthening’
/-məŋ/, /-mai/	-	‘Double Negation, Quantifier Negation, Existential Negation’

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