Gender and Number in Monsang / Sirti

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Abstract:

This paper attempts to describe gender and number in Monsang/Sirti language. Monsang/Sirti is a Northwestern Kuki-Chin (NWKC) language, formerly referred to as "Old Kuki'. Ethnically, Monsang is a Naga tribe/community. The language is spoken in only six villages by about 2500 people in Chandel District of Manipur, Northeast India. No previous work has been done on the language and as such, it remains little known.

This paper is divided into two parts. The first part deals with gender and the second part deals with number. Gender in Monsang is not grammatical, and is based on sex. It is divided into three types viz. masculine, feminine and common gender. Number in Monsang can be discussed under singular and plural.

Key words: Gender, Number, Monsang, Northwestern Kuki-Chin, Tibeto-Burman

1. Introduction

This paper describes gender and number in Monsang, a previously undocumented language of Northwestern Kuki-Chin branch. Earlier, this branch of Kuki-Chin languages was referred to as "Old Kuki". Monsang is spoken in only six villages in Chandel District of Manipur, Northeast India. It has a total population of about 2500 only. The Monsang people live

in close contact with the Anal, Chothe, Lamkang, Maring, Moyon and Tarao.

The present paper is based on data elicited from the native speakers of Monsang of Liwachangning village, Chandel District.

2. Gender

Monsang has a gender system based on natural gender or biological sex. The gender distinctions of nouns are largely dependent on two basic categorization of the nouns such as (+) animate and (–) animate. The nouns of (+) animate category show further sub-division of (+) human and (–) human.

In order to make the gender distinction of (+) animate nouns, Monsang uses one of the two methods:

i. Use of pairs of opposite lexical items, or
ii. Use of attributives referring to male or female after the noun.

2.1. Use of Pairs of Opposite Lexical Items

There are words in Monsang in which gender distinction is made by using pairs of opposite lexical items. Such pairs of words have no formal relationship. Given below in Table 1. are few examples.

Table 1. Pairs of Opposite Lexical Items in Monsang

Masculine		Feminine	
/iler/	lad	/luŋha/	lass
/pʷusar/	husband	/lummhi/	wife
/apu/	grandpa	/api/	grandma
/abaraŋ/	uncle	/ani/	aunty

2.2. Use of Attributives

The other method of distinguishing gender in Monsang is the use of attributives referring to male or female after the nouns. This could be illustrated in Table 2. for (+) human and Table 3. (–) human as shown below.

(+) Human

Table 2. (+) Human Attributives in Monsang

Masculine		Feminine	
/sapa/	son	/sanʷu/	daughter
/itarpa/	old man	/itarnʷu/	old woman
/mipa/	father	/minʷu/	mother
/betumpa/	youngest son	/betumnʷu/	youngest daughter

From the above table, it can be seen that for (+) Human, Monsang uses /-pa/ for masculine and /-nʷu/ for feminine.

(–) Human

Table 3. (–) Human Attributives in Monsang

Masculine		Feminine	
/kir-ʧar/	he-goat	/kir-nʷu/	she-goat
/sər-ʧar/	bull	/sər-nʷu/	cow
/utti-ʧar/	dog	/utti-nʷu/	bitch
/vo-ʧar/	pig	/vo-nʷu/	sow

From the above table, it can be seen that for (–) Human, Monsang uses /-ʧar/ for masculine and /-nʷu/ for feminine.

3. Number

Monsang makes a distinction between nouns of general reference and those of specific reference. In general reference, base forms i.e. bare noun roots are used. In specific reference, it shows a two-way contrast in terms of number such as singular, and plural. The singular forms are identical with bare roots which are used in general reference. The plural forms are derived from the root forms by suffixation of the morpheme {-he}. This suffix is added to all nouns- animate or inanimate, human or non-human, to derive the plural forms.

3.1.   Pluralisation of Nouns

The pluralisation of nouns in Monsang can be illustrated as follows.

Singular   Plural
/vati/   'bird'   /vati-he/   'birds'
/mi/   'person'   /mi-he/   'persons'
/sa/   'animal'   /sa-he/   'animals'
/pʰoŋ/   'gun'   /phoŋ-he/   'guns'

3.2.   Pluralisation of NP containing N + Nouns of Multitude

When a noun of multitude {bekhe} meaning 'all' follows the noun, the suffixation of the plural morphemes is optional. This can be illustrated as follows.

> a. nepaŋ bekʰe (-he)
>   child   all   (pl.)
>   'all   children'.
> b. phoŋ   bekhe (-he)
>   gun   all   (pl.)
>   'all   guns'.

Note: The plural morpheme (-he) is kept within brackets to indicate that their suffixation is optional.

3.3.   Pluralisation of NP containing N + Numeral

When a numeral expressing 'two or more' follows the noun, the suffixation of the plural morpheme is optional and is restricted to + animate nouns only. This can be seen in the following examples.

> a. nepaŋ minlə (-he)
>   child   four   (pl.)
>   'four   children'.
> b. sər   roŋa   (-he)
>   cow   five   (pl.)

'five   cows'.

Note: The plural morphemes are kept within brackets to indicate that their suffixation is optional.

Conclusion

This paper presents gender and number in Monsang, a relatively unknown language. Gender in Monsang is not grammatical, and is based on sex. It is divided into masculine, feminine and common genders. In specific reference of nouns, Monsang shows a two-way contrast of number into singular and plural. The plural forms are derived from the root forms by suffixation of the morpheme {-he}.

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