Common Methods of Number Distinction in Boro and Other Cognate Languages of North-East India

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Boro, Rabha, and Kokborok languages have common linguistic features. As belong to the same linguistic family, they correspond with similar typological nature. Though these languages do not have proto-type agglutinating characteristic, still more or less it is remaining in their structure particularly in the formation of words. The structural features found in the methods of pluralization in these languages and other cognates of BG (Boro-Garo) group of languages scattered in North-East India are comparatively similar. Here analysis will be made on the typological features of number distinction found in Boro, Rabha, and Kokborok languages. In these languages, generally pluralization is made by some processes: (1) by using words of multitude; (2) by using plural suffixes; and (3) by reduplication of nominal words. In this paper, particularly, the major interest will be on typological analysis. The aim of the paper is to analyse the process of number distinction used among the three languages, i.e., Boro, Rabha, and Kokborok.

Keywords: cognate languages, number distinction, common method, BG (Boro-Garo) languages

Introduction

Here the generic term Boro\(^1\) is used to denote both the language and the linguistic community. This language is spoken by the Boros which belongs to Tibeto-Burman sub-family of Sino-Tibetan family of languages. Other cognate language means some offshoot languages of TB (Tibeto-Burman origin) group, genetically correspond to Boro language. These are Dimasa, Rabha, Kokborok, Garo, Tiwa, Deuri-Chutia, and Hajong etc.\(^2\). As belong to the TB group, these languages have more or less common linguistic features. That is why linguistic affinities and genetic relationship are found closely among them.

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1. Boro is a scheduled language, recognized by the constitution of India in 2003. This language is not only the means of day-to-day communication but also a language of literature and education. It has been taught up to university level of education as a subject language in some universities of India; particularly in the state of Assam. Written Boro literature is now flourishing in various genres. Language and linguistic study has also been attempted since last few years back by some Boro linguists. Dictionary and grammar book has been written in Boro. The parent literary body The Bodo Sahitya Sabha is taking outstanding effort for development of the language linguistic community.

2. As per 2001 Census Report of Assam, (in Assam) the total numbers of population of Boro speech community are estimated as 1,296,162; but in comparison to the mother tongue population of Boro speech community, the total number of population of other speech communities belonging to the cognate languages are found less as estimated in the Census Report of Assam, 2001. The Garo mother tongue populations are shown as 144,767; the Rabha mother tongue populations are estimated as 130,875; the total number of Dimasa mother tongue populations are 108,133, and the Kokborok speakers are estimated as 17,380 respectively. In the demographic picture of populations, the Boroks have placed in the second position next to the Bangla linguistic community in the state of Tripura. The total numbers of Kokborok speakers are estimated 31.05% as recorded in 2001 Census Report of Tripura.
Number Distinction Made by Using Words of Multitude

Most of the cognate languages have words denoting meaning of multitude that are used for expression of number distinction. Usually these are nominal class of words that precede or follow the noun in a noun phrase.

In Boro, a few collective adjective words are used for expressing sense of multitude; like \(/g\text{u}ba\eta/—more/many, /\text{b}u\text{r}za/—so much, /p^h\text{a}lu//—a herd of/a flock of, and /hanza/—a group of (in case of human being) etc.. Generally these are used before the noun class of word. For example: /g\text{u}ba\eta \text{mua}/—more things, /g\text{u}ba\eta \text{mansi}/—many people, /g\text{u}ba\eta \text{bizab}/—many books, /\text{b}u\text{r}za \text{mua}/—more/many things, /m\text{a}la\eta p^h\text{al}u/—a herd of cows (in case of animals), /dau p^h\text{a}lu/—a flock of birds (in case of birds and insects), and /mansi \text{hanza}/—a group of people (in case of human being) etc.. These are pluralized form represented by using words of multitude. On the other hand, singular form is made by using single words or in some cases by using numeral classifiers before the different numerals. For example: /ma-se-dau/—(a bird), Here {ma-} is a classifier, {se-} is a numeral, and {-dau} represents the bird. One more example is: /sa-se-\text{mansi}/—a man. Here also {sa-} is a classifier, {se-} means “one”, and {-mansi} means “man”. This type of formation is found more in this language. Similar application may be found in other cognate languages.

In Rabha, words like /\text{pa}\eta /—many/more, /\text{pal}/—herd of (in case of animals), /\text{zakri}/—group of (in case of fish) etc., are used for representation of multitude. Examples may be shown (see Examples 1-3):

Example (1) /\text{pa}\eta /: /\text{pa}\eta \text{r}\omega/—many/more stones [/\text{r}\omega/-stone]  
/\text{pa}\eta \text{kau}\omega/—many books [/\text{kau}\omega/-book]  
/t\omega-\text{pa}\eta /—many birds [/t\omega/-bird]  
/par-\text{pa}\eta /—many flowers [/par/-flower] etc.,

Example (2) /\text{pal}/: /\text{masu-pal}/—herd of cows [/\text{masu/-cow}]  
/t\omega-\text{pal}/—flock of birds [/t\omega/-bird] etc.,

Example (3) /\text{zakri}/: /\text{na-zakri}/—group of fishes [/\text{na/-fish}] etc.

In Kokborok, analogous word like /\text{ku}\text{ba}\eta / which denotes sense of multitude has also been used with the noun class of words (see Example 4).

Example (4) /\text{ku}\text{ba}\eta -b\text{ora}k/  
↓  ↓  ↓
Many Borok people  
/\text{ku}\text{ba}\eta -\text{mai}\eta y\omega/  
↓  ↓  ↓
Many elephant [/\text{mai}\eta y\omega/-elephant]  
/\text{ku}\text{ba}\eta -l\text{ama}/  
↓  ↓  ↓
Many way, many roads [/l\text{ama/-road, way, path}] etc.

Besides, some other words are used before the noun class of words for expressing meaning of multitude. Some of them are /z\omega\omega/-many/more, /b\text{ebak/-}many/more, /\text{l}\text{n}\text{ka/-}more, /p\omega/-more, and /g\text{ilama/-}more etc.. For example: /z\omega\omega-\text{kok}/—all the speeches, /b\text{ebak-k\omega\omega}/—all the hairs, /p\omega-\text{lama/-}roads/ways, /g\text{ilama-ri/-}many clothes, and /g\text{i}\text{la-m\omega\omega\text{k}\text{ra}/—many monkeys etc.
Plurality Expressed by Using Suffixes

In most cases, plural suffixes are required for expression of meaning of plurality. Generally these suffixes are added after the nominal class of words.

In Boro, there are three types of plural suffixes. These are: {-�ूर}, {-मिन}, and {-पुर}. The plural suffixes {-सूर} and {-मिन} are used with the personal pronouns, particularly with the second and third personal pronoun. Examples may be given (see Examples 5-6):

Example (5) {-सूर}: नूष्य (you)-सूर > नूष्यसूर (you), बी (he/she)-सूर > बीसूर (they).

Example (6) {-मिन}: नूष्य-चौ-मिन > नूष्यचौमिन (you), बी (he/she)-चौ-मिन > बीचौमिन (they).

Here the suffix {-तः} is used in honorific sense in some cases, and this is occurred with second and third personal pronoun /नूण/ and /बिण/ respectively. The plural suffix {-मिन} is not occurred directly to the second and third personal pronoun. For expression of plurality the suffix is added after this type of morphological construction. Sometimes the plural suffix {-मिन} is also added with kinship terms, e.g., ada (elder brother)-मिन > adamiन (brother and others), अपा (my father)-मिन > अपामिन (my father and others), पैंर (younger brother)-मिन > पैंरमिन (younger brother and others), and अब्र (my elder sister)-मिन > अब्रमिन (my elder sister and others), etc.

{-पुर}: Usually the suffix is added with the noun class of words for expression of plurality. It is used in case of human and non-human beings, insects, natural objects, and different things as well as objects, e.g., मानस (man)-पुर > मानसपुर (men), गो (child)-पुर > गोपुर (children), हिन्ड (woman)-पुर > हिन्डपुर (women), मूसुत (cow)-पुर > मूसुतपुर (cows), दारु (bird)-पुर > दारुपुर (birds), नाच (fish)-पुर > नाचपुर (fishes), गुमा (grasshopper)-पुर > गुमापुर (grasshopper), हटर (star)-पुर > हटरपुर (stars), बिदर (flower)-पुर > बिदरपुर (flowers), बिलाई (leaf)-पुर > बिलाइपुर (leaves), बिपाआ (tree)-पुर > बिपाआपुर (trees), पिताई (fruit)-पुर > पिताईपुर (fruits), and बिजाब (book)-पुर > बिजाबपुर (books), etc.

In comparison to the Boro language, Rabha has also the same morphological process. There are three types of plural suffixes, e.g., {-बिजान}, {-ताइ}, and {-रॉन}. The suffix {-बिजान} is used with various things and objects, animals and some other insects, e.g., भै (fruit)-बिजान > भैबिजान (fruits), फूल (flower)-बिजान > पारबिजान (flowers), पान (tree)-बिजान > पांबिजान (trees), रेड (banana)-बिजान > रेडबिजान (bananas), नेन (cloth)-बिजान > नेनबिजान (clothes), सम (mortar)-बिजान > समबिजान (morters), नूक (house)-बिजान > नूकबिजान (houses), की (dog)-बिजान (dogs), मसा (tiger)-बिजान > मसाबिजान (tigers), बक (pig)-बिजान > बकबिजान (pigs), कें (crab)-बिजान > केंबिजान (crabs), बिबुर (spider)-बिजान > बिबुरबिजान (spiders), कंकु (ant)-बिजान > कंकुबिजान (ants), and गुक (grasshopper)-बिजान > गुकबिजान (grasshoppers), etc.

{-ताइ} is added with the kinship terms and terms related to human being, e.g., दादा (elder brother)-ताइ > दादाताइ (elder brother and others), बबी (elder sister)-ताइ > बबीताइ (elder sister and others), बबा (father)-ताइ > बबाताइ (father and others), आइ (mother)-ताइ > आइताइ (mother and others), राबा (Rabha community)-ताइ > राबाताइ (Rabha peoples), फा (man)-ताइ > फाताइ (men), and गाबुर (young boy)-ताइ > गाबुरताइ (young boys), etc.

Another plural suffix {-रॉन} is applicable with the second and third personal pronouns for representation of plurality, e.g., नान (you)-रॉन > नानरॉन (you), न (he/she)-रॉन > रॉन (they).

Kokborok has also the plural suffixes like {-सोन} and {-रोग}. The plural suffix {-सोन} is added with kinship terms and terms of human being. For example: अमा (my mother)-सोन > अमासोन (my mother and others), बुपा
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(his/her father)-sənə > bupʰəsənə (his/her father and others). Thus {-rəɡ} is added with second and third personal pronouns, e.g., nɪ́ːnə (you)-rəɡ > nərəɡ (you). Also it is used with animals and insects, things and natural objects, e.g., tək (bird)-rəɡ > təkrəɡ (birds), mayuŋ (elephant)-rəɡ > mayuŋrəɡ (elephants), musuk (cow)-rəɡ > musukrəɡ (cows), mú̃kʰrə (monkey)-rəɡ > mú̃kʰtərəɡ (monkeys), sibuk (snake)-rəɡ > sibukrəɡ (snakes), bəŋ (spider)-rəɡ > bəŋərəɡ (spiders), a (fish)-rəɡ > arəɡ (fishes), kəŋraɪ (crab)-rəɡ > kəŋraɪrəɡ (crabs), lama (path/way)-rəɡ > lamarəɡ (paths/ways), bupʰən (tree)-rəɡ > bupʰənərəɡ (trees), kʰum (flower)-rəɡ > kʰumərəɡ (flowers), bəŋʰəi (fruit)-rəɡ > bəŋʰəiərəɡ (fruits), tʰəisuk (mango)-rəɡ > tʰəisukərəɡ (mangoes), ləi (leaf)-rəɡ > lairəɡ, bupʰəsənə > bupʰəsənə (his/her father and others), buma (his/her mother)-sənə > bumasənə (his/her mother), and kisi (friend)-sənə > kisisənə (friends), etc.

Plurality Expressed by Reduplication

In these languages sense of plurality is expressed by reduplication of words of noun class. Sometimes a word is uttered repetitively and used in representation of plurality.

In Boro, /nɔ/ means house. While it is articulated again and again it denotes sense of many more (see Example 7).

Example (7) /nɔ nɔ—house to house, i.e., go door to door /nɔ/-house

Thus, /gami gami—village to village /gami/-village

/sûr sûr pʰəjɪ̆dən—Who are the people come here /sûr/-who, /pʰəjɪ̆dən/- come

The Rabha has also the similar process used in their representation of plurality (see Example 8).

Example (8) /nək nək—house to house, i.e., used for many houses /nək/-house, home

/sənə sənə—village to village, i.e., used for many villages /sənə/-village

For representation of plurality, Kokborok uses reduplication of words of noun class (see Example 9).

Example (9) /nək nək birza—begs house to house /nək/-house

/kami kami—village to village, i.e., used for many villages /kami/-village

Words of adjective class are also usually pluralized by rhythmic use of words. While it is used repeatedly in an expression, in that case it bears sense of plurality. In all the cognate languages, words of adjective class are repeatedly articulated for representation of plural number. Some examples may be noted from these languages (see Examples 10-12):

Example (10) Boro:

/sɔmaina sɔmaina bibrə
↓ ↓ ↓
Beautiful beautiful flower, i.e., used in the sense of beautiful flowers
/gɪ̆mən gɪ̆mən pʰɪ̆tʰəi/
↓ ↓ ↓
Ripen ripen fruit, i.e., used in the sense of ripen fruits

Example (11) Rabha:

/nɛmə nɛmə par/
↓ ↓ ↓
Beautiful beautiful flower, i.e., beautiful flowers
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Example (12) Kokborok:

/khum nait hɔ k ɔ /
↓ ↓ ↓
Flower beautiful beautiful, i.e., beautiful flowers
/tʰaisuk kumun kumun/}
↓ ↓ ↓
Mango ripen ripen, i.e., ripen mangoes

Conclusions

Here the analysis has been done base on data collected from a primary and secondary sources. It is a data based comparative analysis on the process of number distinction of the three cognate languages of TB origin. The comparative analysis makes clear that the cognate languages have correspondences in the process of number distinction. They share a common typology regarding use of plural suffixes. All the words of nominal class may be pluralized by using typical suffixes having sense of plurality. Every plural suffixes have own identity and specific function that may be added with specific words. For example, Boro plural suffix {mɔn} is strictly applicable to kinship terms and in some specific cases to personal pronouns. But it does not applicable to non-human beings and things. Thus {pʰur} is also strictly applicable to non-human beings, and natural things and objects. It has special identity and context to be used. Of course it may be used with the words of human being for representation of plurality, i.e., gɔthɔ (child)-pʰur > gɔthɔpʰur (children), pʰɔraisapʰur (students), and haluaipʰur (cultivators), etc.. This typological feature is found in these languages. Rabha and Kokborok have also similar typological process of number distinction that may be comparable to Boro language.

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