Morphological Change and Fast Speech Phenomena in the Manipuri Verb

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1 Introduction

The Tibeto-Burman language Manipuri exhibits an elaborate verbal morphology: it consists of 31 derivational and 8 inflectional morphemes. This synchronic result is brought about by two favored patterns of diachronic development. First, lexical stems form the basis for affixes and are gradually reduced to affixal status. Second, fast speech rules have the effect of obliterating word and morpheme boundaries. Phonological sequences resulting from the merger of syntactic units through such processes are lexicalized and function as affixes.

2 The Manipuri verb

(1) provides a schematic representation of the Manipuri verb. To be free standing, the verb must minimally consist of a root and a single inflectional marker (INFL). There are three derivational categories which may optionally precede the final inflectional suffix. These are: the first level derivational suffixes (1LD), which signal adverbial meanings; the second level derivational suffixes (2LD), which have evidential values, signal the deictic reference of a verb or indicate the number of persons an action is performed by; and the third level derivational suffixes (3LD), which signal meanings of aspect and mood.
These three levels of derivational morphology are determined on the basis of the distribution and ordering of morphemes within each category. At 1LD only one 1LD suffix may appear on a verb and this suffix must occur directly to the left of the verb root. At 2LD up to ten 2LD suffixes may occur in a verb; these suffixes must occur directly after the 1LD suffixes. The order of suffixes at this level is controlled solely by semantic scope. Opposed to this, the order of 3LD suffixes (there may be up to 3 of these and they occur directly after 2LD suffixes), is fixed.

The possibility of variable ordering with 2LD suffixes, which corresponds to scope differences, is illustrated in (2a-h)\(^1\). For example, (2a) can be opposed with (2b) where the evidential -læm combines with -khi ‘still’: in the sequence -khiræm where -læm has scope over -khi, the meaning obtained is ‘probably still V’, and with the sequence -ramkhi the meaning obtained is ‘still seems V’.
(2a) məhak čák čákhirəmmoy
   mə -hak čák čá -khi -ləm -loy
3P -here rice eat -still -evd -npot
   he food not seem to still eat
He probably still did not eat.

(2b) məhak čátləmkiroy
   mə -hak čat -ləm -khi -loy
3P -here go -evd -still -npot
   he still seems to not have left
It still seems that he has not left.

In (2c) the marker -khi 'still' has scope over the directional marker -lək whereas in (2d) -khi does not have scope over -lək.

(2c) purəkmənkhre
   pu -lək -mən -khi -lə -e
   carry -dist -excess -still -perf -asrt
   has carried too much from a distance

(2d) paythokpihənkhirəʔəmmi
   pay -thok -pi -hən -khi -lək -ləm -í
   fly -out -rec -caus-still -dist -evd -nhyp
Someone set it free/let it fly before I could get there to make that happen myself.

Similarly, in (2e) the causative marker -hən has scope over -nin 'wish' signalling 'wish to cause to V' as opposed to (2f) where the meaning 'cause to wish to V' is signalled.

(2e) məhaknə æyбу čáníŋhəllí
   mə-hak-nə æy-pu čá -nin -həl -í
3P-here-CNTR I -pat eat-wish-caus-nhyp
   he I cause to want to eat
He made me feel like eating.
(2f) páhənniŋŋi
   pā -hən -niŋ -ī
read -caus -wish -nhyp
(I) wished to cause him to read.

Also compare (2g) with (2h): in (2h) the causative marker -hən has scope over the directional -lək whereas in (2g) it does not. In (2h) the action is instigated at a distance and continues to the place of speech whereas in (2g), the action is instigated and completed at a distance after which the speaker moves towards the place of speech.

(2g) čahəllə’e
   čä -həl -lək -e
eat -caus -dist -asrt
I was made to eat when I was there.

(2h) chiti ədu purəkhəŋkhre
   chiti ə -tu pu -lək -hən -khi -lə -e
letter att -dDET carry -dist -caus -still -perf -asrt
letter that caused to carry
(Tomba) caused him (when over there) to bring the letter here (at an earlier time).

3 Patterns of lexicalization

Verb morphology in Manipuri is derived through two processes. 1LD and 2LD affixes are historically derived through the reduction of stems into affixes. Evidence will be provided that 3LD affixes are derived differently: stems are reduced phonologically through fast speech rules and are reanalyzed as affixes.

3.1 The historical origin of 1LD and 2LD affixes

1LD and 2LD affixes have a diachronic relationship with a stem which is still in use in the language; that is, the affix has been derived from the stem. In (3a) and (3b) the left