MANIPURI ADJECTIVES: A NEW APPROACH

Soibam Imoba Singh
Manipur University, Manipur, India

and

Leihaorambam Sarbajit Singh
Indian Institute of Technology, Guwahati, Assam, India

The main goals of this paper are to discuss (a) the formation of Manipuri adjectives by using the ø- prefix; (b) exceptional absence of the adjectival ø- prefix; (c) the placement of the adjective; and (d) the possible historical evolution of its syntactic behavior.

A. THE FORMATION OF MANIPURI ADJECTIVES BY USING ø- PREFIX

In Manipuri the prefix ø- plays a major role in the formation of adjectives. All the verb roots (VR) in the language are in bound forms. A large number of grammatical suffixes are used to form words, since the verbal roots are not free. All the verb roots (VR) of Manipuri can form a simple derived word by suffixing the nominalizer (NMS) -po ~ -bo, e.g.:

A1. (i)  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>a</th>
<th>+</th>
<th>bo</th>
<th>/cabɔ/</th>
<th>‘to eat’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>VR</td>
<td>NMS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>eat</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(ii)  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>pu</th>
<th>+</th>
<th>bo</th>
<th>/pubɔ/</th>
<th>‘to borrow’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>VR</td>
<td>NMS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>borrow</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(iii)  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>jen</th>
<th>+</th>
<th>bo</th>
<th>/jenbo/</th>
<th>‘to look’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>VR</td>
<td>NMS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>look</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(iv)  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>jen</th>
<th>+</th>
<th>bo</th>
<th>/jenbo/</th>
<th>‘to distribute’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>VR</td>
<td>NMS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>distribute</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(v)  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>lot</th>
<th>+</th>
<th>po</th>
<th>/lotpɔ/</th>
<th>‘to hide’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>VR</td>
<td>NMS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hide</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A root that is suffixed with - pó ~ bə may form a derived adjective by means of the prefix ə-, as in the following examples:

A2. (i) ə + prefix ca + bə /əcabə/ ‘eaten’
     VR eat

(ii) ə + prefix pu + bə /əpubə/ ‘borrowed’
     VR borrow

(iii) ə + prefix jen + bə /əjenbə/ ‘looked/watched’
     VR look

(iv) ə + prefix jen + bə /əjenbə/ ‘distributed’
     VR distribute

(v) ə + prefix lot + bə /ərotbə/ ‘hidden’
     VR hide

(vi) ə + prefix tu + bə /ətubə/ ‘fallen’
     VR fall

It is ungrammatical or incomplete to form a word using the ə- (prefix) without the NMS suffix.
B1. EXCEPTIONAL ABSENCE OF THE ADJECTIVAL ङ- PREFIX

Some exceptional verbal roots do not require the prefix ङ- in adjective formation, e.g.:

(i) \( \text{phē- mango} + \text{bē} + \text{loj} /\text{pʰɛŋə loj}/ \) ‘a beautiful flower’

(ii) \( \text{nugisi} + \text{bē} + \text{mēnem} /\text{nunyaibē mēnem}/ \) ‘a sweet smell’

(iii) \( \text{nunēj} + \text{bē} + \text{paw} /\text{nunējibē paw}/ \) ‘happy news’

(iv) \( \text{nunon} + \text{bē} + \text{isēj} /\text{nunonibē isēj}/ \) ‘a heartening song’

It is ungrammatical to use the prefix ङ- with these words; for example:

(a) \( \text{ङ} + \text{loj} /\text{pʰɛŋə loj}/ \)  

(b) \( \text{ङ} + \text{nugisi} /\text{nunyaibē}/ \)

(c) \( \text{ङ} + \text{nunēj} /\text{nunējibē}/ \)

(d) \( \text{ङ} + \text{nunon} /\text{nunonibē}/ \)

Since Manipuri is monosyllabic and agglutinative, it is an indispensable task to analyze each syllable of every word, especially the verbal roots. If we analyze these exceptions, we see that these verbal roots have more than one syllable, and can possibly be treated as compounds. In such cases, if the verb roots have more than one syllable the prefix ङ- cannot be employed for adjectives in Manipuri.

How are compounds formed in Manipuri?

Reconstruction of the meanings of the examples in B1 (i to iv).
(i) The verb *pʰəjɔ* consists of two monosyllabic roots:

\[ pʰə + sa + bɔ \rightarrow pʰəwəbɔ \quad \text{‘beautiful’} \]

VR \quad VR \quad NMS

\text{good} \quad \text{make}

The philosophy here, is that “goodness is the source of beauty”, or “goodness is the element of beauty”. The second syllable (root) *jɔ* in the word *pʰəjɔbɔ* is derived from *sa* ‘make’. Many morphemes having the /s/ sound are becoming [j] in Manipuri. For instance, *kʰan-* ‘think’ + *sanbɔ* ‘play’ has become the compounded form *kʰənjanbɔ* ‘doubt/hesitate’, etc. It can also be noted that [j] is an allophone of the phoneme /s/ in Manipuri.

(ii)

The verb *nuŋsi* also contains two syllables, i.e. *nuŋ* ‘internal’ and *si* ‘keep’. Semantically we can assume that if we love somebody we keep him/her internally. It is an internal thing. So we can treat the verb *nuŋsi* as a compound (Opaque type).

The second root *si* ‘keep’ goes with some limited words, like *lik* ‘chain’ *sibɔ* ‘to keep around the neck’, and again *sana* ‘gold’ + *sibɔ* ‘keep’ *sana sibɔ* ‘to wear gold’ ‘to keep gold on the body’, etc.

(iii)

Similarly (iii) also has two syllables conveying the meaning *nuŋ* ‘internal’ and *raj* ‘wait’. The combined meaning is ‘happy’. Semantically we can explain this compound by observing that we ‘wait’ for something that relates to our desire. We never ‘wait’ for an unwanted thing or situation. No doubt, time may bring the unwanted thing but it may not be our desire.

(iv)

Relating to the last example (iv), the word *nuŋonbɔ* also consists of two syllables, viz. the root *nuŋ* ‘internal’ and *on* ‘move or change’ the whole meaning is ‘heartening’ or ‘emotional’. Semantically we can explain that if we hear wonderful news or information or a sweet song or if we see a lovely place usually it moves us or makes an emotional appeal to our mind. In such a situation or context we employ the word *nuŋonbɔ*. For instance *nuŋonbɔ isaj* ‘a heartening song’, *nuŋonbɔ paw* ‘an emotional piece of news’ or ‘information’ etc.