

## 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 *ə-* prefix; (b) exceptional absence of the adjectival *ə-* 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 *ə-* PREFIX

In Manipuri the prefix *ə-* 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) *-pə ~ -bə*, e.g.:

A1. (i)	<i>æ</i> VR eat	+	<i>bə</i> NMS	/cabə/	'to eat'
(ii)	<i>pu</i> VR borrow	+	<i>bə</i> NMS	/pubə/	'to borrow'
(iii)	<i>jeŋ</i> VR look	+	<i>bə</i> NMS	/jeŋbə/	'to look'
(iv)	<i>jen</i> VR distribute	+	<i>bə</i> NMS	/jenbə/	'to distribute'
(v)	<i>lot</i> VR hide	+	<i>pə</i> NMS	/lotpə/	'to hide'

(vi)	<i>tu</i> VR fall	+	<i>bə</i> NMS	/tubə/	'to fall'
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A root that is suffixed with **-pə ~ bə** may form a derived adjective by means of the prefix **ə-**, as in the following examples:

A2. (i)	ə + prefix	<i>ca</i> VR eat	+	<i>bə</i> NMS	/əcabə/	'eaten'
					/əcabə cak/	'the eaten rice'
(ii)	ə + prefix	<i>pu</i> VR borrow	+	<i>bə</i> NMS	/əpubə/	'borrowed'
					/əpubə sel/	'the borrowed money'
(iii)	ə + prefix	<i>jeŋ</i> VR look	+	<i>bə</i> NMS	/əjeŋbə/	'looked / watched'
					/əjeŋbə p <sup>h</sup> iləm/	'the film which has been watched'
(iv)	ə + prefix	<i>jen</i> VR distribute	+	<i>bə</i> NMS	/əjenbə/	'distributed'
					/əjenbə ceŋ/	'the distributed rice'
(v)	ə + prefix	<i>lot</i> VR hide	+	<i>bə</i> NMS	/ərotbə/	'hidden'
					/ərotbə lən/	'the hidden wealth'
(vi)	ə + prefix	<i>tu</i> VR fall	+	<i>bə</i> NMS	/ətubə/	'fallen'
					/ətubə u/	'the fallen tree'

It is ungrammatical or incomplete to form a word using the **ə-** (prefix) without the NMS suffix.

# B1. EXCEPTIONAL ABSENCE OF THE ADJECTIVAL ə- PREFIX

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

- |       |                               |   |                  |   |                       |                            |                      |
|-------|-------------------------------|---|------------------|---|-----------------------|----------------------------|----------------------|
| (i)   | <i>phə-ŋə</i><br>VR<br>beauty | + | <i>bə</i><br>NMS | + | <i>ləj</i><br>flower  | /p <sup>h</sup> əjəbə ləj/ | 'a beautiful flower' |
| (ii)  | <i>nuŋsi</i><br>VR<br>sweet   | + | <i>bə</i><br>NMS | + | <i>mənəm</i><br>smell | /nuŋsibə mənəm/            | 'a sweet smell'      |
| (iii) | <i>nuŋŋəj</i><br>VR<br>happy  | + | <i>bə</i><br>NMS | + | <i>paw</i><br>news    | /nuŋŋəjbə paw/             | 'happy news'         |
| (iv)  | <i>nuŋon</i><br>VR<br>hearten | + | <i>bə</i><br>NMS | + | <i>isəj</i><br>song   | /nuŋonbə isəj/             | 'a heartening song'  |

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

- |     |             |   |   |   |                  |                          |
|-----|-------------|---|---|---|------------------|--------------------------|
| (a) | ə<br>prefix | + | <i>p<sup>h</sup>əjə</i><br>VR<br>beauty | + | <i>bə</i><br>NMS | */əp <sup>h</sup> əjəbə/ |
| (b) | ə<br>prefix | + | <i>nuŋsi</i><br>VR<br>sweet             | + | <i>bə</i><br>NMS | */ənūŋsibə/              |
| (c) | ə<br>prefix | + | <i>nuŋŋəj</i><br>VR<br>happy            | + | <i>bə</i><br>NMS | */ənūŋəjbə/              |
| (d) | ə<br>prefix | + | <i>nuŋon</i><br>VR<br>heartening        | + | <i>bə</i><br>NMS | */ənūŋonbə/              |

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 ə- 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  $p^həjə$  consists of two monosyllabic roots:

$p^hə$	+	$sa$	+	$bə$	>	$p^həwəbə$	'beautiful'
VR		VR		NMS			
good		make					

The philosophy here, is that "goodness is the source of beauty", or "goodness is the element of beauty". The second syllable (root)  $jə$  in the word  $p^həjəbə$  is derived from  $sa$  'make'. Many morphemes having the /s/ sound are becoming [j] in Manipuri. For instance,  $k^hən$ - 'think' +  $sanəbə$  'play' has become the compounded form  $k^hənjanəbə$  'doubt/hesitate', etc. It can also be noted that [j] is an allophone of the phoneme /s/ in Manipuri.

(ii)

The verb **nunsi** also contains two syllables, i.e. **nun** '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 **nunsi** as a compound (Opaque type).

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

(iii)

Similarly (iii) also has two syllables conveying the meaning **nun** 'internal' and **naj** '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 **nunonbə** also consists of two syllables, viz. the root **nun** '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 **nunonbə**. For instance **nunonbə isəj** 'a heartening song', **nunonbə paw** 'an emotional piece of news' or 'information' etc.