MANIPURI ADJECTIVES: A NEW APPROACH

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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) -po ∼ -bə, e.g.:

A 1. (i) əa + əbo /cabə/ ‘to eat’
        VR        NMS
        eat

(ii) pu + əbo /pubə/ ‘to borrow’
       VR        NMS
       borrow

(iii) jən + əbo /jenbə/ ‘to look’
       VR        NMS
       look

(iv) jən + əbo /jenbə/ ‘to distribute’
       VR        NMS
       distribute

(v) lot + po /lotpo/ ‘to hide’
    VR        NMS
    hide

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A root that is suffixed with -pə ~ bə may form a derived adjective by means of the prefix ᵐ-, as in the following examples:

A2. (i) ᵐ + prefix  ca  +  bə  /əcabə/  ‘eaten’
   VR  eat  NMS
   /əcabə cak/  ‘the eaten rice’

(ii) ᵐ + prefix  pu  +  bə  /əpubə/  ‘borrowed’
   VR  borrow  NMS
   /əpubə sel/  ‘the borrowed money’

(iii) ᵐ + prefix  jen  +  bə  /əjenba/  ‘looked / watched’
   VR  look  NMS
   /əjenba pʰiləm/  ‘the film which has been watched’

(iv) ᵐ + prefix  jen  +  bə  /əjenba/  ‘distributed’
   VR  distribute  NMS
   /əjenba ceŋ/  ‘the distributed rice’

(v) ᵐ + prefix  lot  +  bə  /ərotbə/  ‘hidden’
   VR  hide  NMS
   /ərotbə lən/  ‘the hidden wealth’

(vi) ᵐ + prefix  tu  +  bə  /ətubə/  ‘fallen’
   VR  fall  NMS
   /ətubə u/  ‘the fallen tree’

It is ungrammatical or incomplete to form a word using the ᵐ- (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) \( phə-ə + bə + ləj \) /pʰəəəə ɭəj/ ‘a beautiful flower’

(ii) \( nuŋəsi + bə + məəəm \) /nuŋəsibə məəəm/ ‘a sweet smell’

(iii) \( nuŋəaj + bə + paw \) /nuŋəajbə paw/ ‘happy news’

(iv) \( nuŋəon + bə + isəj \) /nuŋəonbə isəj/ ‘a heartening song’

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

(a) \( ə + pʰəəə + bə \) */əpʰəəəbə/

(b) \( ə + nuŋəsi + bə \) */ənuŋsibə/

(c) \( ə + nuŋəaj + bə \) */ənuŋəajbə/

(d) \( ə + nuŋəon + bə \) */ənuŋəonbə/

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 $p^h\text{jo}$ consists of two monosyllabic roots:

\[
p^h\text{jo} + sa + bo > p^h\text{jo}\text{bo} \quad \text{‘beautiful’}
\]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VR</th>
<th>VR</th>
<th>NMS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>good</td>
<td>make</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

The philosophy here, is that “goodness is the source of beauty”, or “goodness is the element of beauty”. The second syllable (root) $\text{jo}$ in the word $p^h\text{jo}\text{bo}$ is derived from $sa$ ‘make’. Many morphemes having the /s/ sound are becoming [j] in Manipuri. For instance, $k^h\text{on}$ ‘think’ + $\text{sanbo}$ ‘play’ has become the compounded form $k^h\text{on}\text{sanbo}$ ‘doubt/hesitate’, etc. It can also be noted that [j] is an allophone of the phoneme /s/ in Manipuri.

(ii)

The verb $\text{nunji}$ also contains two syllables, i.e. $\text{nun}$ ‘internal’ and $\text{si}$ ‘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 $\text{nunji}$ as a compound (Opaque type).

The second root $\text{si}$ ‘keep’ goes with some limited words, like $\text{lik}$ ‘chain’ $\text{sib}\text{e}$ ‘to keep around the neck’, and again $\text{sana}$ ‘gold’ + $\text{sib}\text{e}$ ‘keep’ $\text{sana sib}\text{e}$ ‘to wear gold’ ‘to keep gold on the body’, etc.

(iii)

Similarly (iii) also has two syllables conveying the meaning $\text{nun}$ ‘internal’ and $\text{raj}$ ‘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 $\text{nunonbo}$ also consists of two syllables, viz. the root $\text{nun}$ ‘internal’ and $\text{on}$ ‘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 $\text{nunonbo}$. For instance $\text{nunonbo isaj}$ ‘a heartening song’, $\text{nunonbo paw}$ ‘an emotional piece of news’ or ‘information’ etc.
Although /a/ often remains after /s/ phonemically, /a/ becomes /ɑ/ in compounding. Example, (i) /sa/ ‘animal’ + /kon/ ‘curve’ > /səgon/ ‘horse’ (k ~ g), (ii) /sa/ ‘animal’ + /ci/ ‘horn’ > /səjì/ ‘deer’ (c~j), etc.

The hypothesis can be verified by the following example. The word /nəmtʰibə/ ‘having a bad smell’ is an adjective, composed of the morphemes /nəm/ ‘smell’ + /tʰi/ ‘bad’ + /bə/ ‘NMS’. Since the word is a compound the prefix ə- is not required. A form like */nəmtʰibə/ is ungrammatical in Manipuri.

**B 2.** If the verbal root (VR) is suffixed with the negative marker (NM) -tə ~ -də and followed by the nominalizer suffix (NMS) -pə ~ -bə, the adjectival prefix marker ə- is also superfluous, e.g.:

1] ca + də + bə  cak  /cadəbə cak/  ‘uneaten rice’
   VR  NM  NMS  (the rice which is uneaten)
   eat  rice

2] ca + tə + bə  gʰəɾi  /cətəbə gʰəɾi/  ‘a stopped watch’
   VR  NM  NMS  (watch which is not working)
   go  watch

3] yen + də + bə  pʰɪləm  /yenəbə pʰɪləm/  ‘the film which has not been seen’
   VR  NM  NMS
   look  film

4] pet + tə + bə  ləjkʰom  /petəbə ləjkʰom/  ‘the clay which is not soft’
   VR  NM  NMS
   soft  clay

**B3.** The adjectival prefix ə- is not required if the verbal root is immediately followed by an aspect marker (AM) and followed by a nominalizer (NMS).

1] ca + ri + bə  cak  /caribə cak/  ‘the rice which is being eaten’
   VR  AM  NMS  (the rice which has been eaten)
   eat  rice

2] pu + rə + bə  sel  /purəbə sel/  ‘the borrowed money’
   VR  AM  NMS  (the money which has been borrowed)
   borrow  money
3] *i* + *ri* + *bə*  *lajrik* /ɪɾəklɪbə *lajrik*/  ‘the book which is being written’
   VR   NM  NMS  write  book

4] *pi* + *kʰrə* + *bə*  *kʰudol* /pɪkʰrəbə *kʰudol*/  ‘the gift which has already been given’
   VR  AM  NMS  give  gift

**B4.** If the verbal root occurs with the suffix -nə [as specifier (SPC)] and is followed by the NMS the prefix ə- is abandoned, e.g.:

1] *jek* + *nə* + *bə*  *ce* /jeknəbə *ce*/  ‘drawing paper’
   draw  SPC  NMS  paper

2] *tum* + *nə* + *bə* + *ka* /tumnəbə *ka*/  ‘sleeping room, bed room’
   sleep  SPC  NMS  room

3] *tʰek* + *nə* + *bə*  *isij* /tʰeknəbə *isij*/  ‘drinking water’
   Drink  SPC  MNS  water

4] *pa* + *nə* + *bə*  *ce* /panəbə *ce*/  ‘reading paper or material’
   read  SPC  NMS  paper

**C1. PLACEMENT OF THE ADJECTIVE**

In Manipuri, the prefixed adjective, in most cases, can appear either before or after the noun without change of meaning, e.g.:

1] ə*kənba*  *nupa* or  *nupa*  akənba  ‘a strong man’
   adj.  N  N  adj.  strong  man  man  strong

2] ə*sənba*  *Wari* or  *wari*  asənba  ‘a lengthy story’
   adj.  N  N  adj.  long  story  story  long

3] ə*cənba*  *huj* or  *huj*  acənba  ‘a big dog’
   adj  N  N  adj.  big  dog  dog  big

4] ə*mənba*  *jum* or  *jum*  amənba  ‘an old house’
   adj.  N  N  adj.  old  house  house  old
C2 Numerals (Nu) or quantifiers (Q) always follow the nouns they modify.

1] ənŋ / Nu/Q child
    one
    ‘one child’  */ənŋ ənŋ/

2] nupi / Nu/Q women
    three
    ‘three women’  */nupi nupi/

3] u / Nu/Q tree
    some
    ‘some tree’  */u u/

4] kəj / Nu/Q tiger
    many
    ‘many tigers’  */kəj kəj/

In the case of lexicalized compounds of the (Noun + Adjective → Noun) type, the adjective appears as the second constituent:

D. THE POSSIBLE HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF THE PLACEMENT OF THE ADJECTIVE

In light of what we have seen above, it becomes clear that the basic position of adjectives in Manipuri would be after the noun. The placement of adjectives before the noun, perhaps, would be a later development in the language, due especially to influence from Indo-Aryan languages. Some important compounds of Hindi and Bengali origin have been used in Manipuri for a long time, for example:
Quite a number of Indo-Aryan phrases or compounds are used in Manipuri, since the Manipuri population embraced Vaishnavism. As a result of the influence of Hindi and Bengali the placement of the adjective before the noun can be considered as a recent development in Manipuri language. This argument is supported by two facts: (i) if a compound noun is formed with an adjective, the noun must precede the adjective; (ii) numeral and quantitative adjectives cannot appear before a noun.