

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

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

- | | | | | | | |
|-----|-------------|---|---|---|------------------|--------------------------|
| (a) | ə
prefix | + | <i>p^həjə</i>
VR
beauty | + | <i>bə</i>
NMS | */əp ^h əjəbə/ |
| (b) | ə
prefix | + | <i>nuŋsi</i>
VR
sweet | + | <i>bə</i>
NMS | */ənūŋsibə/ |
| (c) | ə
prefix | + | <i>nuŋŋəj</i>
VR
happy | + | <i>bə</i>
NMS | */ənūŋəjbə/ |
| (d) | ə
prefix | + | <i>nuŋon</i>
VR
heartening | + | <i>bə</i>
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 **nunjsi** also contains two syllables, i.e. **nunj** ‘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 **nunjsi** 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 **nunj** ‘internal’ and **ɲaj** ‘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 **nunjonbə** also consists of two syllables, viz. the root **nunj** ‘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 **nunjonbə**. For instance **nunjonbə isəj** ‘a heartening song’, **nunjonbə paw** ‘an emotional piece of news’ or ‘information’ 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 */ənəmtʰibə/ is ungrammatical in Manipuri.

1]	<i>ca</i> + <i>də</i> + <i>bə</i>	<i>ca</i>	/cadəbə ca/	'uneaten rice' (the rice which is uneaten)
	VR NM NMS			
	eat	rice		
2]	<i>cət</i> + <i>tə</i> + <i>bə</i>	<i>g^həri</i>	/cəttəbə g ^h əri/	'a stopped watch' (watch which is not working)
	VR NM NMS			
	go	watch		
3]	<i>yeŋ</i> + <i>də</i> + <i>bə</i>	<i>p^hiləm</i>	/yeŋdəbə p ^h iləm/	'the film which has not been seen'
	VR NM NMS			
	look	film		
4]	<i>pet</i> + <i>tə</i> + <i>bə</i>	<i>ləjk^hom</i>	/pettəbə ləjk ^h om/	'the clay which is not soft'
	VR NM NMS			
	soft	clay		

1] *ca* + *ri* + *bə* *cak* /*caribə cak*/ 'the rice which is being eaten'
VR AM NMS
eat rice

2] *pu* + *rə* + *bə* *sel* /*purəbə sel*/ 'the borrowed money'
VR AM NMS
borrow money
(the money which has been borrowed)

- 3] *i* + *ri* + *bə* *lajrik* /*irəklibə lajrik*/ 'the book which is
VR NM NMS book being written'
- 4] *pi* + *kʰrə* + *bə* *kʰudol* /*pikʰrəbə kʰudol*/ 'the gift which has
VR AM NMS already been given'
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,
sleep SPC NMS room bed room'
- 3] *tʰek* + *nə* + *bə* *isiŋ* /*tʰeknəbə siŋ*/ 'drinking water'
Drink SPC MNS water
- 4] *pa* + *nə* + *bə* *ce* /*panəbə ce*/ 'reading paper
read SPC NMS paper or material'

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] *əkənbə* *nupa* or *nupa* *əkənbə* 'a strong man'
adj. N N adj.
strong man man strong
- 2] *əsəŋbə* *Wari* or *wari* *əsəŋbə* 'a lengthy story'
adj. N N adj.
long story story long
- 3] *əcəwbə* *huj* or *huj* *əcəwbə* 'a big dog'
adj. N N adj.
big dog dog big
- 4] *əmənbə* *jum* or *jum* *əmənbə* 'an old house'
adj. N N adj.
old house house old

C2 Numerals (Nu) or quantifiers (Q) always follow the nouns they modify.

1]	<i>aŋaŋ</i> N child	<i>əmə</i> Nu/Q one	'one child'	*/əmə aŋaŋ/
2]	<i>nupi</i> N women	<i>əhum</i> Nu/Q three	'three women'	*/əhum nupi/
3]	<i>u</i> N tree	<i>k^hərə</i> Nu/Q some	'some tree'	*/k ^h ərə u/
4]	<i>kəj</i> N tiger	<i>məjam</i> Nu/Q many	'many tigers'	*/məjam kəj/

In the case of lexicalised 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:

- | | | | | |
|-------|-------------------------------|---|----------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| (i) | <i>kala</i>
adj.
black | + | <i>nimmək</i>
N
salt | 'a kind of salt having a black color' |
| (ii) | <i>bor</i>
adj.
big | + | <i>din</i>
N
day | 'Christmas' |
| (iii) | <i>kala</i>
adj.
black | + | <i>can</i>
N
moon | 'new moon' |
| (iv) | <i>gəwrə</i>
adj.
white | + | <i>can</i>
N
moon | 'full moon' |

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.