Common Methods of Number Distinction in Boro and Other Cognate Languages of North-East India

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Boro, Rabha, and Kokborok languages have common linguistic features. As belong to the same linguistic family, they correspond with similar typological nature. Though these languages do not have proto-type agglutinating characteristic, still more or less it is remaining in their structure particularly in the formation of words. The structural features found in the methods of pluralization in these languages and other cognates of BG (Boro-Garo) group of languages scattered in North-East India are comparatively similar. Here analysis will be made on the typological features of number distinction found in Boro, Rabha, and Kokborok languages. In these languages, generally pluralization is made by some processes: (1) by using words of multitude; (2) by using plural suffixes; and (3) by reduplication of nominal words. In this paper, particularly, the major interest will be on typological analysis. The aim of the paper is to analyse the process of number distinction used among the three languages, i.e., Boro, Rabha, and Kokborok.

Keywords: cognate languages, number distinction, common method, BG (Boro-Garo) languages

Introduction

Here the generic term *Boro*[1] is used to denote both the language and the linguistic community. This language is spoken by the Boros which belongs to Tibeto-Burman sub-family of Sino-Tibetan family of languages. Other cognate language means some offshoot languages of TB (Tibeto-Burman origin) group, genetically correspond to Boro language. These are Dimasa, Rabha, Kokborok, Garo, Tiwa, Deuri-Chutia, and Hajong etc..[2] As belong to the TB group, these languages have more or less common linguistic features. That is why linguistic affinities and genetic relationship are found closely among them.

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[1] Boro is a scheduled language, recognized by the constitution of India in 2003. This language is not only the means of day-to-day communication but also a language of literature and education. It has been taught upto university level of education as a subject language in some universities of India; particularly in the state of Assam. Written Boro literature is now flourishing in various genres. Language and linguistic study has also been attempted since last few years back by some Boro linguists. Dictionary and grammar book has been written in Boro. The parent literary body The Bodo Sahitya Sabha is taking outstanding effort for development of the language linguistic community.

[2] As per 2001 Census Report of Assam, (in Assam) the total numbers of population of Boro speech community are estimated as 1,296,162; but in comparison to the mother tongue population of Boro speech community, the total number of population of other speech communities belonging to the cognate languages are found less as estimated in the Census Report of Assam, 2001. The Garo mother tongue populations are shown as 144,767; the Rabha mother tongue populations are estimated as 130,875; the total number of Dimasa mother tongue populations are 108,133, and the Kokborok speakers are estimated as 17,380 respectively. In the demographic picture of populations, the Boroks have placed in the second position next to the Bangla linguistic community in the state of Tripura. The total numbers of Kokborok speakers are estimated 31.05% as recorded in 2001 Census Report of Tripura.

Number Distinction Made by Using Words of Multitude

Most of the cognate languages have words denoting meaning of multitude that are used for expression of number distinction. Usually these are nominal class of words that precede or follow the noun in a noun phrase.

In Boro, a few collective adjective words are used for expressing sense of multitude; like /gɯbaŋ/—more/many, /burza/—so much, /pʰalɯ/—a herd of/a flock of, and /hanza/—a group of (in case of human being) etc.. Generally these are used before the noun class of word. For example: /gɯbaŋ mua/—more things, /gɯbaŋ mansi/—many people, /gɯbaŋ bizab/—many books, /burza mua/—more/many things, /mɯsɯu pʰalɯ /—a herd of cows (in case of animals), /dau pʰalɯ/—a flock of birds (in case of birds and insects), and /mansi hanza/—a group of people (in case of human being) etc.. These are pluralized form represented by using words of multitude. On the other hand, singular form is made by using single words or in some cases by using numeral classifiers before the different numerals. For example: /ma-se-dau/—(a bird), Here {ma-} is a classifier, {-se-} is a numeral, and {-dau} represents the bird. One more example is: /sa-se-mansi/—a man. Here also {sa-} is a classifier, {-se-} means "one", and {-mansi} means "man". This type of formation is found more in this language. Similar application may be found in other cognate languages.

In Rabha, words like **/paŋa/**—many/more, **/pal/**—herd of (in case of animals), **/zakri/**—group of (in case of fish) etc., are used for representation of multitude. Examples may be shown (see Examples 1-3):

Example (1) **/paŋa/**: /paŋa rɔŋ/—many/more stones [/rɔŋ/-stone]

/paŋa kausa/—many books [/kausa/-book]

/tɔ-paŋa/—many birds [/tɔ/-bird]

/par-paŋa/—many flowers [/par/-flower] etc.,

Example (2) **/pal/**: /masu-pal /—herd of cows [/masu/-cow]

/tɔ-pal/—flock of birds [/tɔ/-bird] etc.,

Example (3) **/zakri/**: /na–zakri/—group of fishes [/na/-fish] etc.

In Kokborok, analogous word like **/kɯbaŋ/** which denotes sense of multitude has also been used with the noun class of words (see Example 4).

Example (4) /kɯbaŋ-bɔrɔk/

↓   ↓

Many Borok people

/kɯbaŋ-maiyuŋ/

↓   ↓

Many elephant [/maiyuŋ/-elephant]

/kɯbaŋ-lama/

↓   ↓

Many way, many roads [/lama/-road, way, path] etc.

Besides, some other words are used before the noun class of words for expressing meaning of multitude. Some of them are /zɔtɔ/—many/more, /bebak/—many/more, /laŋka/—more, /pa/—more, and /gilama/—more etc.. For example: /zɔtɔ-kɔk/—all the speeches, /bebak-kʰnai/—all the hairs, /pa-lama/—roads/ways, /gilama-ri/—many clothes, and /gila-mɯkʰra/—many monkeys etc.

Plurality Expressed by Using Suffixes

In most cases, plural suffixes are required for expression of meaning of plurality. Generally these suffixes are added after the nominal class of words.

In Boro, there are three types of plural suffixes.These are: {-sɯr}, {-mɯn}, and{-pʰɯr}. The plural suffixes {-sɯr} and {-mɯn} are used with the personal pronouns, particularly with the second and third personal pronoun. Examples may be given (see Examples 5-6):

Example (5) {-sɯr}: nɯŋ (you)-sɯr > nɯŋsɯr (you), bi (he/she)-sɯr > bisɯr (they).

Example (6) {-mɯn}: nɯŋ-tʰaŋ-mɯn > nɯŋtʰaŋmɯn (you), bi (he/she)-tʰaŋ-mɯn > bitʰaŋmɯn (they).

Here the suffix {-tʰaŋ} is used in honorific sense in some cases, and this is occurred with second and third personal pronoun /nɯŋ/ and /bi/ respectively. The plural suffix {-mɯn} is not occurred directly to the second and third personal pronoun. For expression of plurality the suffix is added after this type of morphological construction. Sometimes the plural suffix {-mɯn} is also added with kinship terms, e.g., ada (elder brother)-mɯn > adamɯn (brother and others), apʰa (my father)-mɯn > apʰamɯn (my father and others), pʰɔŋbai (younger brother)-mɯn > pʰɔŋbaimɯn (younger brother and others), and abɔ (my elder sister)-mɯn > abɔmɯn (my elder sister and others), etc.

{-pʰɯr}: Usually the suffix is added with the noun class of words for expression of plurality. It is used in case of human and non-human beings, insects, natural objects, and different things as well as objects, e.g., mansi (man)-pʰɯr > mansipʰɯr (men), gɔtʰɔ (child)-pʰɯr > gɔtʰɔpʰɯr (children), hinzau (woman)-pʰɯr > hinzaupʰɯr (women), mɯsɯu (cow)-pʰɯr > mɯsɯupʰɯr (cows), dau (bird)-pʰɯr > daupʰɯr (birds), na (fish)-pʰɯr > napʰɯr (fishes), guma (grasshooper)-pʰɯr > gumapʰɯr (grasshopper), hatʰorkʰi (star)-pʰɯr > hatʰorkʰipʰɯr (stars), bibar (flower)-pʰɯr > bibarpʰɯr (flowers), bilai (leaf)-pʰɯr > bilaipʰɯr (leaves), bipʰaŋ (tree)-pʰɯr > bipʰaŋpʰɯr (trees), pʰitʰai (fruit)-pʰɯr > pʰitʰaipʰɯr (fruits), and bizab (book)-pʰɯr > bizabpʰɯr (books), etc.

In comparison to the Boro language, Rabha has also the same morphological process. There are three types of plural suffixes, e.g., {-bizan}, {-taŋ}, and {-roŋ}. The suffix {-bizan} is used with various things and objects, animals and some other insects, e.g., tʰe (fruit)-bizan > tʰebizan (fruits), par (flower)-bizan > parbizan (flowers), pan (tree)-bizan > panbizan (trees), retʰe (banana)-bizan > retʰebizan (bananas), nen (cloth)-bizan > nenbizan (clothes), sam (mortar)-bizan > sambizan (morters), nɔk (house)-bizan > nɔkbizan (houses), ki (dog)-bizan (dogs), masa (tiger)-bizan > masabizan (tigers), bak (pig)-bizan > bakbizan (pigs), kʰen (crab)-bizan > kʰenbizan (crabs), bibur (spider)-bizan > biburbizan (spiders), kaŋku (ant)-bizan > kaŋkubizan (ants), and guk (grasshopper)-bizan > gukbizan (grasshoppers), etc.

{-taŋ} is added with the kinship terms and terms related to human being, e.g., dada (elder brother)-taŋ > dadataŋ (elder brother and others), bibi (elder sister)-taŋ > bibitaŋ (elder sister and others), baba (father)-taŋ > babataŋ (father and others), aia (mother)-taŋ > aiataŋ (mother and others), raba (Rabha community)-taŋ > rabataŋ (Rabha peoples), kai (man)-taŋ > kaitaŋ (men), and gabur (young boy)-taŋ > gaburtaŋ (young boys), etc.

Another plural suffix {-roŋ} is applicable with the second and third personal pronouns for representation of plurality, e.g., naŋ (you)-rɔŋ > narɔŋ (you), ɔ (he/she)-rɔŋ > ɔrɔŋ (they).

Kokborok has also the plural suffixes like {-sɔŋ} and {-rɔg}. The plural suffix {sɔŋ} is added with kinship terms and terms of human being. For example: **ama** (my mother)-sɔŋ > amasɔŋ (my mother and others), **bupʰa**

(his/her father)-sɔŋ > bupʰasɔŋ (his/her father and others). Thus {-rɔg} is added with second and third personal pronouns, e.g., nɯŋ (you)-rɔg > nɔrɔg (you). Also it is used with animals and insects, things and natural objects, e.g., tɔk (bird)-rɔg > tɔkrɔg (birds), mayuŋ (elephant)-rɔg > mayuŋrɔg (elephants), musuk (cow)-rɔg > musukrɔg (cows), mɯkʰra (monkey)-rɔg > mɯkʰrarɔg (monkeys), sibuk (snake)-rɔg > sibukrɔg (snakes), beŋ (spider)-rɔg > beŋrɔg (spiders), a (fish)-rɔg > arɔg (fishes), kaŋrai (crab)-rɔg > kaŋrairɔg (crabs), lama (path/way)-rɔg > lamarɔg (paths/ways), bupʰaŋ (tree)-rɔg > bupʰaŋrɔg (trees), kʰum (flower)-rɔg > kʰumrɔg (flowers), bɯtʰai (fruit)-rɔg > bɯtʰairɔg (fruits), tʰaisuk (mango)-rɔg > tʰaisukrɔg (mangoes), lai (leaf)-rɔg > lairɔg, bupʰa-sɔŋ > bupʰasɔŋ (his/her father and others), buma (his/her mother)-sɔŋ > bumasɔŋ (his/her mother), and kisiŋ (friend)-sɔŋ > kisiŋsɔŋ (friends), etc.

Plurality Expressed by Reduplication

In these languages sense of plurality is expressed by reduplication of words of noun class. Sometimes a word is uttered repetitively and used in representation of plurality.

In Boro, /nɔ/ means house. While it is articulated again and again it denotes sense of many more (see Example 7).

Example (7) /nɔ nɔ/—house to house, i.e., go door to door [/nɔ/-house]

Thus, /gami gami/—village to village [/gami/-village]

/sɯr sɯr pʰɯidɯŋ/—Who are the people come here [/sɯr/-who, /pʰɯidɯŋ/- come]

The Rabha has also the similar process used in their representation of plurality (see Example 8).

Example (8) /nɔk nɔk/—house to house, i.e., used for many houses [/nɔk/-house, home]

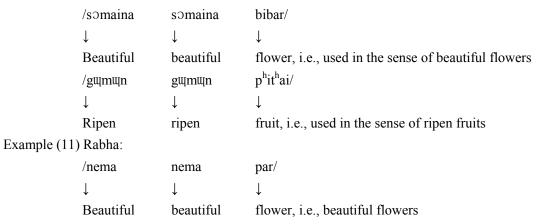/sɔŋ sɔŋ/—village to village, i.e., used for many villages [/sɔŋ/-village]

For representation of plurality, Kokborok uses reduplication of words of noun class (see Example 9).

Example (9) /nɔk nɔk birzaɔ/—begs house to house [/nɔk/-house]

/kami kami- ɔnɔ/—village to village, i.e., used for many villages [/kami/-village]

Words of adjective class are also usually pluralized by rhythmic use of words. While it is used repeatedly in an expression, in that case it bears sense of plurality. In all the cognate languages, words of adjective class are repeatedly articulated for representation of plural number. Some examples may be noted from these languages (see Examples 10-12):

Example (10) Boro:

/sɔmaina	sɔmaina	bibar/
↓	↓	↓
Beautiful	beautiful	flower, i.e., used in the sense of beautiful flowers
/gɯmɯn	gɯmɯn	pʰitʰai/
↓	↓	↓
Ripen	ripen	fruit, i.e., used in the sense of ripen fruits

Example (11) Rabha:

/nema	nema	par/
↓	↓	↓
Beautiful	beautiful	flower, i.e., beautiful flowers

/pidan	pidan	nɔk/
↓	↓	↓
new	new	house, i.e., new houses

Example (12) Kokborok:

/kʰum	naitʰ ɔk	naitʰ ɔk/
↓	↓	↓
Flower	beautiful	beautiful, i.e., beautiful flowers
/tʰaisuk	kumun	kumun/
↓	↓	↓
Mango	ripen	ripen, i.e., ripen mangoes

Conclusions

Here the analysis has been done base on data collected from a primary and secondary sources. It is a data based comparative analysis on the process of number distinction of the three cognate languages of TB origin. The comparative analysis makes clear that the cognate languages have correspondences in the process of number distinction. They share a common typology regarding use of plural suffixes. All the words of nominal class may be pluralized by using typical suffixes having sense of plurality. Every plural suffixes have own identity and specific function that may be added with specific words. For example, Boro plural suffix {**-mɯn**} is strictly applicable to kinship terms and in some specific cases to personal pronouns. But it does not applicable to non-human beings and things. Thus {**-pʰɯr**} is also strictly applicable to non-human beings, and natural things and objects. It has special identity and context to be used. Of course it may be used with the words of human being for representation of plurality, i.e., gɔtʰɔ (child)-pʰɯr > gɔtʰɔpʰɯr (children), pʰɔraisa (student)-pʰɯr > pʰɔraisapʰɯr (students), and haluai (cultivator)-pʰɯr > haluaipʰɯr (cultivators), etc.. This typological feature is found in these languages. Rabha and Kokborok have also similar typological process of number distinction that may be comparable to Boro language.

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