WORD FORMATION IN THADOU

ABSTRACT

Thadou is one of the major Tibeto-Burman languages spoken in Northeast Indian state of Manipur, Nagaland and Assam. The language is also spoken in Myanmar (Burma) in close proximity with other Kuki-Chin languages such as Tiddim, Sizang, Lai, etc whose number is difficult to quantify. Thadou is mutually intelligible with other Kuki-Chin languages, viz. Paite, Simte, Gangte, Vaiphei and Zou and closely related to Hmar and Mizo. The name Thadou is matter of controversy among the speakers of the language. When Thadou was recognized as the name of the language in Manipur in 1956, not all sections of the community were happy to identify themselves as Thadou. Their contention being that Thadou being just one of the names of the clans in the geneology of their tribe could not be used as the embraced name of their language. Since then, an attempt to change the language from Thadou to Kuki was initiated by the non-Thadous who were not in favour of using the name of their language as Thadou. Such attempt to change the name of the language was never free from opposition from the pro-Thadous who insisted the name Thadou be used as the name of the language. Since, then many efforts to resolve the controversy surrounding the nomenclature of the language were initiated especially from intellectual class. As a result of these efforts, the name of the language was renamed as Thadou-Kuki by blending the two terms Thadou and Kuki as Thadou-Kuki. Since then, the literary committee of the language made it mandatory that all textbooks taught in Manipur should bear the name Thadou-Kuki.
But, in Nagaland and Assam the language remains to be known as Kuki only. This study prefers to call the language as Thadou for the simple reason that most of the existing literature uses the language in question either as Thado, Thadou or Thadou-Kuki.

Thadou grammar has received less attention than its phonology. For one, the area is basically inaccessible to foreigners so that fieldwork is virtually impossible. Also, very few, native speakers are trained in Linguistics so that non-Thadous attempting to study the language have very scant resources. Moreover, since most of the literature on Thadou has been written by foreigners, the available information is not completely reliable. Most of the available literature on Thadou are too scanty and seldom discusses the morphology of the language. Thus, the present study is the first of its kind which provides detailed information about the morphology of the language in general and word formation in particular. The present study also discusses the word formation strategies viz. inflectional, derivation, compounding and reduplication in greater detail. Thadou has larger number of inflectional affixes than derivational affixes. Formation of new words by means of prefixation is relatively unproductive than that of suffixation. Compounding is by far the most productive means of deriving new words in Thadou. Thadou has both endocentric and exocentric compound. Again these compounds can be either right-headed or left-headed. In addition, Thadou had co-ordinate, conjunctive and opaque compound. Thadou is noted for the occurrence of chiming adverbs. Chiming adverbs is a special kind of reduplicated adverb, very common in the colloquial style in which there is a variation in the vowels of the adverb (Peri Bhaskararao (1989:110). The process of Chiming is attributed to be one of the
characteristics of colloquial style. Bhaskararao also observes that simple reduplication is less common among adverbs as compared to chiming. Like in Tiddim, chimed adverbs in Thadou are always composed of two syllables which begin with a consonant: the second syllable being a copy of the first syllable except that in a majority of the cases the vowel of the second syllable is more open than that of the first syllables.

The present study is divided into 6 chapters. Chapter 1 discusses the background of the Thadous in terms of their language, geographical location and bilingualism, etc. This chapter also discusses at length the linguistic situation in Manipur and the position of Thadou within the Tibeto-Burman language family as outlined by different Tibeto-Burmanists, viz. Bradley (1997), Grierson (1904), Matisoff (2003) and Benedict (1972). In addition to the above mentioned, the present chapter also discusses the origin, custom and traditions of the Thadous that have been handed down until the present days in the form of oral literature.

Chapter 2 reviews the available literature of Thadou written by different linguists both Indian and foreign scholars alike. The earliest accounts of the language were written by the British administrators and anthropologists namely, Stewards (1856), Grierson (1904), Hodson (1906) and William Shaw (1929).

Steward (1856) provides a brief phonological description in addition to providing a brief description each on the various grammatical categories, viz. articles, nouns, adjectives, pronouns and verbs. But made no mentioned on adverbs.

Grierson (1904) provides a sketchy account on the phonology and grammar of the language in a limited way. At the level of grammatical description, Grierson begins with the inconsistency in the pronunciation of the language. But in the absence of any
phonetic chart, it is often difficult to determine the accuracy of the pronunciation from
the examples he provides. For example, in his observation about the long and short
vowels, Grierson provides khāt and khat ‘one’ and nā and na ‘thy’ to be the long and
short forms where in both the instances, the vowel is schwa which is always short.
Other inconsistencies in the pronunciation pointed out by Grierson are the
interchangeability of the vowels u and o in word like khut or khot ‘hand’ which are
found in the speech of the speakers of the language even today. But, other examples he
provides to show how the vowels u and a in words like um or am ‘to be’ are not simply
true from the native speaker’s point of view. The correct form of ‘to be’ is um and not
am. Regarding the contracted form of concurrent vowels (vowels occurring adjacent to
each other), Grierson rightly pointed out that such vowels are often contracted, though
few of the examples he provides are not always true. It is to be noted here that,
whenever two vowels occur adjacent to each other, either one of the vowels gets deleted
or a glide is inserted to break such vowel sequences. To compensate the loss of the
vowel which gets deleted a length symbolize as (:) is often inserted in place where the
vowel gets deleted. Some of the examples he provides to show how vowels are
contracted are: a-pa:n for a-pa-in ‘by his father’, pe:n for pe-in ‘give IMP’, la:n for la-in
‘take IMP’ etc.

T.C. Hodson, (1906) provides an informative account of the language including
a specimen of sentence lists and also a section on Thadou-English Dictionary and
English-Thadou Dictionary. At the level of phonology, Hodson begins with the
description of Thadou alphabets on lines of transliteration suggested to him by Sir
Charles Lyall. Hodson also discusses at length the vowel modification, consonants
changes as well as tone and stress in Thadou. At the level of morphology, Hodson also
discusses the different parts of speech where he stressed at length on the articles,
umerals, verbal constructions, postpositions and compound words. Again, at the level
of syntax, Hodson provides a sketchy account of the word order and formation of
interrogative construction in Thadou. Though Hodson’s work is not exhaustive study in
itself, in that much of the affixal morphology has been omitted, tones are not marked
and little to no description of syntax, it still remains a useful source of information for
the language.

Thodou has been described by two Indian linguists, viz. Thirumalai (1972) and
Krishan (1980) in the seventies and eighties. While the work of Thirumalai is focused
purely on the phonology, Krishan for the first time discusses the grammar of Thadou in
the light of taxonomic descriptive Linguistics.

Pauthang Haokip a native speaker has also contributed commendable articles on
the various aspects of the language in various journals. The most scientific description
of the language is that of Hyman (2004) who provides the three chapters on phonology,
nouns and verbs in Thadou.

Chapter 3 deals with the different types of derivation processes in Thadou. The
most productive derivational affixes are the prefix *a-* and the suffix *-na* which derives
nouns from the corresponding verbs after the affixation is applied. Another important
word formation in Thadou is compounding. Thadou exhibits both endocentric and
exocentric compounds which may be either right headed or left headed. Thadou also
exhibits co-ordinate, conjunctive and opaque compounds which are discussed in the
present chapter. The third important word formation process in Thadou is reduplication.
Thadou has a special kind of reduplicated adverbs which is often termed as “chiming adverbs”, in which adverbs are composed of two syllables, the second syllable being a copy of the first syllable. The present chapter provides an exhaustive list of reduplicated adverbs in Thadou.

Chapter 4 discusses the nominal morphology of Thadou. Nouns can be distinguished from other lexical categories on morphological grounds. For example, nouns but not verbs can be suffixed by gender, number or case markers. Proper nouns and common nouns are mostly free standing. Thadou exhibits split demonstrative pronouns in which the pronoun can precede as well as follow the head nouns. Possessive pronouns precede the possessed items. Thadou nouns are not marked for grammatical gender. Semantic gender for animate human nouns may be indicated as feminine or masculine by –nu or –pa, or by –pi or –pu, depending on the age or profession of a person. All kingship terms lower in hierarchy of grandparents, profession and rulers are indicated by -nu and –pa. Unlike, animate human nouns, animate non-human nouns take the gender suffix -pi and –tsal respectively. Inanimate nouns do not take gender markers. Thadou has two numbers: singular and plural. The plural marker –ho is used to indicate general nouns both animate and inanimate objects. The plural marker –te is used to indicate particular group of animate nouns or clan’s names. Thadou has seven case markers, viz, ergative, absolutive, instrumental, locative, associative, genitive and ablative. Thadou is an ergative-absolutive language where the sole argument (the subject) of the transitive verb is marked differently and the subject of the intransitive verb and the object of the transitive verb are marked in the same way. The case marker for the subject of the intransitive verb and the object of the transitive
verb are both absent. The instrumental case is marked by –in which is homophonous with that of the ergative marker. The locative marker is expressed by -aʔ. The genitive case is marked by the possessive pronominal markers or by suffixing the clitic –a to the nouns or pronouns when the possessed noun is not specified. The ablative case is expressed by –pat or –kom. The associative case is expressed by –toʔ which is placed immediately after the person with whom the action is done. Thadou has reasonably large set of classifiers which appear only with nouns. The classifiers in Thadou refer to special semantic fields which include round or oblong items, drop of liquid, elongated items, etc.

The chapter also includes important discussion on the sub-types of nouns such as common nouns, proper nouns, inherently possessed nouns, nature nouns, nouns related to spirit worship, location nouns and direction nouns. Under the section on pronouns, the chapter also discusses an indefinite pronouns, demonstratives pronouns, interrogatives pronouns, numerals, possessive pronouns and reflexive pronouns.

Chapter 5 is divided into two parts, viz. verbs and adverbs. Verbs in Thadou can be identified by a number of distinguishing properties. The lists of properties include, negation, agreement, pre-verbal and post-verbal directional, aspectual, applicative, modals and onomatopoeic expressives. Vendler (1967) identified four classes of verbs according to Aktionsart (German for ‘form of action’): Activities, States, Achievements and Accomplishments. In order to identify Aktionsart class of verbs, various grammatical tests have been suggested and these tests necessarily have to be different for different languages. The section on verbs explains only those tests which are useful
and useable in Thadou. These include: Activity, State, Accomplishment, Causative Accomplishment, Semelfactive manner adverbs and Temporal duration.

Thadou has no tense markers, e ‘non future’ and diŋ ‘future’, function as verb phrase clitics. When an accomplishment is marked by –e there is no indication of whether the event described by the clause is taking place at the time of speaking or has already taken place at some prior time. The clauses which are marked by -e may be interpreted as either past tense or present tense depending on whether the action has taken place just prior to the time of speaking or is taking place at the time of speaking.

The future marker –diŋ on the other hand, typically marks event that will take place subsequently to the time of speaking. At the same time, diŋ also indicates an affirmation of the speaker that a certain event is already decided on and will be carried out (as far as it is humanly possible, of course).

In Thadou, as in most of the world’s language, aspect occurs with greater frequency than tense-marking and mood (Bybee 1985). Modality is expressed by lexical means, by adverb-like forms that follow the main verb and can be preceded by other constituents of the phrase. Deictic modality has to do with the necessity or possibility of actions and is associated with the social functions and obligation. (Bybee and Fleishman 1995:4).

Many linguists and grammarians do not make a distinction between mood and modality. However, Thadou seems to make a distinction between mood and modality. The category of mood is typically divided into: declarative, subjunctive, imperative and interrogative. Mood has to do with the way the speaker wants to communicate. Declarative mood is used when the speaker wants to indicate that he is making a
statement, reporting real event or making assertions that a certain event is taking place or is not taking place (negative assertion). Subjunctive mood is used for hypothetical events, where the speaker wants to express that certain proposition is possible, desirable, doubtful and only potentially true (Audvilc.1999:286). Imperative mood is used by the speaker if he wants to manipulate the hearer to respond physically to his request.

The second part of the fifth chapter is devoted to discussing the adverbs of Thadou. Adverbs are usually referred to as heterogeneous word class (Givon:2001 vol.87) which covers a wide range of semantic concepts and is typically the most unrestricted word class in terms of syntactic distribution. The common characteristic of adverbs consists in the facts that they modify event or state. The section on adverbs discusses the different types of adverbs, viz. time adverbial, adverb of manner and adverb of direction.

Chapter 6 provides a summary and findings of the present study chapter by chapter.

An appendix containing an exhaustive list of Thadou lexicon has been appended at the end to assist the readers in shaping their understanding about the word structure of language under study. It is also hoped that the word lists will be useful for future comparative researchers who wish to undertake comparative studies on the languages of Northeast India in particular or with other languages in general.
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