

Noun Incorporation in Manipuri

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Abstract

The paper describes the phenomenon of noun incorporation in Manipuri. Noun incorporation (NI) is the process of compounding of a noun stem and a verbal stem to yield a complex verbal form. In Manipuri, the noun that occurs in noun incorporation appears to have a close relation to the verb in all their usages. The primary function of noun incorporation is to remove the ambiguities of the homophonous verbal forms. If the incorporated noun is left unspecified the intended meaning of the verbal form would not be very clear. The homophonous verbal form involved may have a different meaning from one another or they may be related with the incorporated verb, in order to show an extended usage. The extension of meaning involves both specialisation as well as generalisation of meanings. Further, the nouns that occur incorporated with verb do not take any case suffixes. The paper will cover the areas of the types of noun incorporation and also different semantic interpretations.

Key words: Noun incorporation, Complex verbal form, Ambiguities, Homophonous, Case suffixes.

Introduction

The paper describes the phenomenon of noun incorporation in Manipuri, a Tibeto-Burman language spoken in Manipur, the north-eastern part of India. Noun incorporation (NI) is a process where a noun stem is compounded with a verbal stem to yield a more specific derived verbal complex. They are by definition semantically more complex.

In Manipuri, the incorporated noun always precedes the verbs. There are two types of NI, namely the classifier incorporation and compound incorporation. The classifier incorporated nouns do not affect the argument structure of the verb with which it gets incorporated, whereas in the compound noun incorporation, there is reduction in the number of core arguments that can occur with the verb (Bhat and Ningomba, 1995). The NI seems to involve a nominal which is both an argument of the verbal form, usually the object and yet appears to be an integral part of the complex verbal form.

The examples 1 and 2 given below exemplify the occurrence of classifier noun incorporation.

1. ma k^hut-nə pəisa pay
he hand-INST money hold-φ
'he holds money with his hand.'

2. əŋaŋ-si mə-kok sa-y
child-DET 3PP-head hot- SA
'The head of the child is hot.'

The above examples show that the verb pay 'hold' and say 'hot' take two arguments i.e. ma 'he' (in 1) əŋaŋ 'child' (in 2) as subject respectively and also pəisa 'money' (in 1), məkok 'his head' (in 2) as object of the verb respectively. The direct object arguments pəisa 'money' and məkok 'his head' are semantically linked to the incorporated verb. It makes classifier NI is quite different from compound NI. For examples:

3. ma pəisa pay
he money hold-φ
'He is rich.'

4. əy kok say
I head hot-SA
'I am restless.'

Syntactically, the above examples (3 and 4) show that the verbs can be intransitive and therefore have reduction in the number of core arguments. For instance, the verbs such as pay 'hold' and say 'hot' have only one argument each i.e. (subject) in both the sentences as ma 'he' (in 3) and əy 'I' (in 4) respectively. The incorporated nouns pəisa 'money' and kok 'head' are the parts of the complex verbal forms indicating the compact meaning of 'rich' and 'restless' respectively.

Ambiguity

Ambiguity means having two or more interpretations. The construction which has two or more meanings is generally known as ambiguous. It may be analysed into two ways as (a) sentence level ambiguous and (b) lexical level ambiguous.

Sentence level ambiguous:

The sentence level ambiguous is caused due to the absence of the incorporated noun. There are some homophonous verbal bases where the meaning intended by the speaker would not be very clear if the incorporated noun is left unspecified. For instance-

- 5a. *sumaŋ-si* *cay*
courtyard-DET be dirty- \emptyset
'The courtyard is dirty.'
- 5b. *məhak-na* *cay*
he-AGT sprinkle- \emptyset
'He sprinkles (something).'

The above examples show that in (5a), the verbal form *cay* 'be dirty' can occur without the incorporated noun because 'cay' gives the meaning of dirty only as in the case of inanimate argument like *sumaŋ* 'courtyard'. In (5b), *cay* 'sprinkle' occurs with an animate argument *məhak* 'he', the verbal form would mean 'sprinkle' only but it has to have some connection with the earlier context during the discourse. For example-

- 5c. *məhak-nə* *isiŋ* *caybə-rə?*
he-AGT water sprinkle-INT
'Does he sprinkle water?'
- 5d. *məhak-nə* *cay*
he-AGT sprinkle- \emptyset
'He sprinkles (something).'

In such cases, the incorporated noun is obligatorily used to avoid misunderstanding among the participants. For instance-

- 5e. *məhak-nə* *isiŋ* *cay*
he-AGT book sprinkle- \emptyset
'He sprinkles the water'

Here, in the above example (5e) the verbal form *cay* 'sprinkle' gives more clear meaning with the occurrence of the noun *isiŋ* 'water'.

Lexical Ambiguous:

The verbal form gives an ambiguous meaning in the lexical level. For instance-

6a. ləisabi-si ŋaw-wi
 girl-DET mad-SA

A. 'The girl is mad'

B. 'The girl is notorious'

In the above example (6a) the verbal form ŋawwi has two meanings i.e. (A) gives the meaning of mad (insane) and another meaning (B) denotes notorious.

6b. ibobi caw-wi
 ibobi big-SA

A. Ibobi is big. (size)

B. Ibobi is powerful. (status)

Extended Meaning

NI may be used to establish the extended usages for some of the verbs. The meaning extension involves the narrowing of meaning to a specific case. For instance, the verbal form k^hum 'to cover' may be used in a specific sense. It gives the specific meaning of 'back answer'

7a. məhək mə-ma-də mə-cin k^hum-mi
 he 3PP-mother-LOC 3PP-mouth response- SA
 'He back answer to his mother.'

In generalise meaning, the verbal form k^hum gives the meaning of 'to cover'.

7b. ma kək k^hum-mi
 he head cover- SA
 'He covers his head.'

7c. məhək p^hi-nə mə-cin k^hum-mi
 he cloth-INST 3PP-mouth cover-SA
 'He covers his mouth with a cloth.'

Meaning Variations

Semantically, there are different types of meaning variations. The classification of these variations is based on the type of nouns which are incorporated to the verbal forms. The incorporated nouns may be of two types i.e., concrete and abstract nouns. The occurrence of these nouns always precedes the verbal forms.

1. Concrete Noun Incorporation

The concrete noun incorporation may further be discussed in the following two ways: animate and inanimate.

1.1. Animate Concrete Noun

The animate concrete noun incorporation indicates some kinds of physical and mental properties of animate beings which are related to body parts as the incorporated noun.

For example:

- | | | |
|---------------------------|-------|-------------|
| 8a. məhək | kək | ləy |
| he | head | be |
| ‘He is brainy.’ | | |
| 8b. məhək | mit | yam-mi |
| he | eye | many-SA |
| ‘He is flirt.’ | | |
| 8c. məhək | məya | cəw-wi |
| he | tooth | protrude-SA |
| ‘He has protruded teeth.’ | | |

1.2. Inanimate Concrete Noun

The inanimate concrete noun incorporation indicates some kind of physical properties of inanimate noun. For example:

- | | | |
|--|---------------------|-------------|
| 9a. t ^h əŋ-si | məya | pəŋ-ŋi |
| knife-DET | tooth | blunt-SA |
| ‘This knife is blunt.’ | | |
| 9b.ləy-si | mək ^h ək | loy-re |
| flower-DET | stem | finish-PERF |
| ‘The flower is about to fall.’ | | |
| 9c. pambi-si | məna | kel-le |
| plant-DET | leaf | fall- PERF |
| ‘The leaves of the plant have fallen.’ | | |

The above examples show that the verbal forms such as pəŋŋi ‘blunt’, loyre ‘fall’, kelle ‘fallen’ state about the physical properties of t^haŋ ‘knife’, ləy ‘flower’, pambi ‘plant’ etc.

2. Abstract Noun Incorporation

The abstract nouns which are related to senses, feelings, nature etc. of body parts are incorporated to the verbal form. These incorporated nouns denote quality, behavioural natures, feelings and conditions.

2.1. Abstract qualities

The abstract nouns such as ləwsɪŋ ‘knowledge’, məgun ‘quality’, pukcel ‘mind’ are bodily related words. If these words are incorporated to the verbal forms, they denote an abstract quality. For example:

10a. məhak	ləwsɪŋ	ləy
he	knowledge	be
‘He is brilliant.’		
10b. məhak	məgun	ləy
he	quality	be
‘He is endowed with quality.’		
10c. məhak	pukcel	pik-i
he	mind	small-SA
‘He is narrow-minded.’		

2.2. Behavioural Nature

The abstract nouns such as ləmcət ‘behaviour’, mənuŋ ‘will power’, t^həwna ‘courage’ etc. are bodily related words. After combining these words with the verbal forms denote ‘behavioural natures’. For example:

11a. məhak	ləmcət	p ^h əjə-y
he	behaviour	good-SA
‘He has a good character.’		
11b. məhak	mənuŋ	kəl-li
he	will power	hard- SA
‘He is stubborn.’		

11c. məhak	t ^h əwna	p ^h ə-y
he	courage	good-SA
‘He is courageous.’		

2.3. Feelings and Conditions

The abstract nouns such as wak^həl ‘mind’, pukniŋ ‘mind’ etc. are bodily related words. After adding these words to the verbal forms denote feelings and conditions.

For example:

12a. məhak	wak ^h əl	laŋtəkənə-y
he	mind	anxious- SA
‘He is anxious.’		

12b. məhak	pukniŋ	laŋtəkənə-y
he	mind	eagerness- SA
‘He is curious.’		

13c. məsi	pukniŋ	hu-y
it	mind	steal-SA
‘It is charming.’		

Case suffixes

In Manipuri, the incorporated nouns do not take case suffixes. For instance-

14a. noŋ	cu-re
rain	fall-PERF
‘It is raining’	

14b. noŋ	k ^h ik-e
rain	sprinkle-PERF
‘It has showered’	

14c. əy	səm	hat-le
I	hair	kill-PERF
‘I have combed’		

The above examples show that the incorporated nouns do not take case suffixes.

Conclusion

In Manipuri, noun incorporation is a productive word formation process. Semantically, it gives some kinds of compact senses. It is also found that many ambiguous meanings can be constructed if the incorporated noun is omitted from the sentence. Such ambiguous meanings may invite to the participants to ask many questions. Dropping of such incorporated nouns neglected specific meaning of the sentence. Here, the question of generalisation is frequently happened to the speakers and contradictorily makes misunderstanding to the hearer. It is also visible that the ambiguity can be seen as (a) ambiguous in the sentence level as well as (b) lexical level.

Abbreviations

be= be verb, PERF= perfect, SA= simple aspect, AGT= agent, DET= determiner, INST= instrumental, INT= interrogative, LOC=locative, 3PP=third person pronominal marker.

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