

The Morphology of

Biate, Hrangkhoh, Khelma, Onaeme, Purum, Liangmai and Yimchunger



Editors

Arup Kumar Nath
Monali Longmailai
Dhanapati Shougrakpam



Centre for Endangered Languages
Tezpur University

The Morphology of Biate, Hrangkhoh, Khelma, Onaeme, Purum, Liangmai and Yimchunger: Produced by the Centre for Endangered Languages, Tezpur University, Assam, India.

©Tezpur University

First Published: March 2021

Published by:
Registrar
Tezpur University
Tezpur, Assam

Price: ₹ 300

ISBN: 978-93-91902-12-4

Printed in India at: S S Graphics, Guwahati-21

Contents	Page No:
Acknowledgements	ii
Coordinator's note	iv
Foreword	v
Editorial Note	viii
Authors' Information	xi
Abbreviations	xiii
Morphology of Biate <i>Daimalu Brahma & Raju Ram Boro</i>	1-36
Morphology and Morphological Aspects of Hrangkhoh <i>Monali Longmailai & Rima Saikia</i>	37-79
Morphology of Khelma <i>Pushpa Renu Bhattacharyya & Barshapriya Dutta</i>	80- 114
An Introduction to the Morphology of Onaeme <i>Bobita Sarangthem & Dulu mani Das</i>	115-150
Morphology of Purum <i>Elangbam Manimohon Meitei & Dhanapati Shougrakpam</i>	151-182
A Morphological Description of Liangmai <i>Charengna Widinibou</i>	183-238
Morphology of Yimchunger <i>I.D. Raguibou & Dinkur Borah</i>	239-270
Indices	271-274

Acknowledgements

A descriptive volume on the morphology of seven lesser-known/researched languages of Northeast India is not possible without the timely contribution and helping hand of many people. Any book meant to serve the need of academic and research communities of linguistics requires lots of diligence, hard work, time, funds and ranges of people starting from technical help to informants of the communities.

We are glad that after a series of periodical and exhaustive field trips and many gruelling sessions with the informants; finally, this book is ready for publication. Let us take this opportunity to extend our heartfelt thanks to the honourable Vice-Chancellor, Tezpur University Prof. Vinod Kumar Jain for his valuable guidance and support. We also extend our sincere thanks to the Pro-Vice Chancellor, the Registrar and all the members of the Publication Committee of Tezpur University.

Let us also put it on record that the Coordinator of the Centre for Endangered Languages, Tezpur University, Prof. Madhumita Barbora has been consistently encouraging and guiding us to move in the right direction so that the book reaches a fruitful conclusion. We thank her for all kinds of timely help. Another senior faculty member of the Centre, Prof. Gautam K. Borah too has been motivational and supportive in this entire exercise. We express our gratefulness to him as well. Our colleagues and staffs in the Department and Centre viz. Ms. Bipasha Patgiri, Dr Amalesh Gope, Dr Bobita Sarangthem and the entire research staffs of the Centre have been all helpful by providing many suggestions and modifications in the brainstorming sessions. We are also thankful to the non-teaching staff of the Centre viz Ms Dipali Sona Nayak, Mr Trilok Narzary and Late Eknath Upadhaya for their help and other logistic supports.

Our contributors in this volume have done a commendable job by not only writing these papers for this volume but also simultaneously working for Syntax and Phonology volumes. We all understand the hardship one has to undergo during a field trip in a very unfavourable condition. Yet they visited the places multiple times where these languages are spoken in the remotest areas of Assam, Manipur and Nagaland and collected the data. The untiring effort of rewriting and reviewing by all the authors need a special mention and we thank each one of them for their sincerity and tenacity.

We are extremely grateful to Prof. Scott DeLancey from the University of Oregon, USA for having agreed to have a quick look at the manuscripts and write a foreword for the volume. His remarks on our work have been a morale booster for all the research staffs working at the Centre.

Most importantly, special mention and appreciation must be made to all the informants that our staff consulted during their multiple field visits in their home turf. It is heartening to notice that by the time of the last field trip the informants realized the real threat hovering around their languages and the need for a timely intervention from the community members to preserve their languages for the future. This volume would not have seen the light of day without their constant help and hospitality. We extend our heartfelt gratitude and thankfulness for their enormous cooperation.

At last, but not the least, it may be noted that without the timely permission, disbursal of funds and the sanction from the University Grants Commission, New Delhi, we would not have moved even an inch towards publication. We thank all the policymakers, officers and staff of UGC. We also take this opportunity to thank our publisher 'SS Graphics' for bringing out this book beautifully.

Thank you.

Arup Kumar Nath
Monali Longmailai
Dhanapati Shougrakpam

Coordinator's Note

One of the mandates proposed by the University Grants Commission (UGC) for the Centre of Endangered Languages set up in nine Central Universities in India is to produce and publish reading materials, dictionaries and books. Keeping in line with the UGC mandate, the Centre for Endangered Languages (CFEL), Tezpur University is ready to publish three volumes on the phonology, morphology and syntax of the seven endangered, lesser-known and lesser researched languages of Assam, Manipur and Nagaland. These languages are Biate, Hrangkhoh and Khelma from Dima Hasao district of Assam; Onaeme from Senapati and Purum from Kangpokpi districts of Manipur and Liangmai from TeningPeren and Yimchunger from Tuensang districts of Nagaland. Out of the seven languages, four languages namely Biate, Hrangkhoh, Khelma and Purum belong to the Kuki-Chin group and the other three languages namely Onaeme, Liangmai and Yimchunger belong to the Naga group of languages. Yimchunger belongs to the Central Naga group, Liangmai to the Zeme group and Onaeme to the Naga group of languages.

The idea to bring out the three volumes focusing on one grammatical aspect of the languages was primarily to highlight the typological features of the two language families namely the Kuki-Chin and Naga group of languages that we have documented. Six field trips, three data verification workshops and several workshops and seminars on various grammatical aspects and features of these two language families have finally helped in the shaping of these three volumes.

Credit for the shaping of these three volumes goes to the seven language communities and the informants who associated themselves with our Field Assistants (FAs), Research Associates (RAs) and the faculties of CFEL, TU. The FAs, RAs, and faculties of CFEL and the linguistic faculties of the department need a special mention. Their diligent work has given the final shape of the three volumes. A very special thanks to the Tezpur University authority and administration who has supported us in our endeavour since the inception of CFEL in 2014.

The three books: Phonetics and Phonology; Volume 1, Morphology; Volume 2 and Syntax; Volume 3 are the contribution of CFEL, TU to the seven communities, researchers and scholars working on Tibeto-Burman languages of Northeast and to the readership at large who has a keen interest in documentation of lesser-known, lesser researched, endangered languages.



Madhumita Barbora
Coordinator
Centre for Endangered Languages
Tezpur University

Foreword

(New insights into the languages of the Indo-Myanmar borderlands)

Northeast India is a treasure trove for linguists, with at least 100, and very possibly twice that many, languages spoken here. With the exception of a few large languages with official status, almost all the languages must be considered potentially endangered; although most are still spoken by children in the communities, the rapid encroachment of modern life poses an existential threat to any small minority language. Very few of these languages have anything close to adequate documentation and description, and the majority are virtually, or completely, undocumented. (The fact that we cannot give a convincing estimate of the number of languages is a clear reflection of this situation). Except for a few Indo-Aryan, Austroasiatic, and Tai languages, almost all of the indigenous languages of the Northeast belong to the great Trans-Himalayan or Tibeto-Burman family, which stretches from western China and Myanmar across the Himalayas into northwest India. It has been evident for years that the resolution of many fundamental problems in comparative Trans-Himalayan linguistics requires data from Northeast India, which until quite recently was all but non-existent. Still today our knowledge of these languages is thin and fragmentary.

These three volumes outline the basic phonological, morphological and syntactic facts of seven previously under- or undescribed languages of Assam, Nagaland and Manipur. Four of these – Biate, Hrangkhoh, Khelma and Purum – belong to the little-known “Old Kuki” or Northwestern South Central subgroup of the Kuki-Chin branch of Tibeto-Burman, a historically important group recognized long ago in the *Linguistic Survey of India*, but for which we are only now beginning to have serious documentation. (The label “Old Kuki”, inherited from the *LSI*, is offensive to many communities and should be abandoned). The other three – Onaeme, Liangmai, and Yimchunger – represent three of the language groups which have been called “Naga” since the *LSI*, although the current consensus is that this is not a genealogical unit or branch within Tibeto-Burman. Once again, this uncertainty about the classification of the “Naga” languages is symptomatic of our ignorance about them; we do not know how to classify them because we do not know enough about them. Thus these volumes represent a substantial contribution to our knowledge of the woefully neglected indigenous languages of the Northeast.

To take one important example, the scant earlier work on languages of this region is sorely lacking in reliable phonological description. This Phonology volume gives us descriptions which can be taken as exemplary by future researchers, with full attention to vowel systems, phonotactics, and, especially, tone. Tone is often ignored entirely in basic descriptive work on languages of Northeast India. Here we now have clear phonetic descriptions, with minimal pairs, of the tone phonemes of each of these languages, giving us unprecedented insight into the distribution of tone systems in this region.

Beyond their immediate value in contributing to the documentation of the languages of the Northeast, these volumes present data which is of great potential value to comparative Trans-Himalayan linguistics and to the broader field of linguistic typology. To begin with, the data here clearly support the classification of Biate, Hrangkhoh, Khelma and Purum as belonging to the same NW Kuki-Chin (“Old Kuki”) group, and just as clearly fail to support the idea of a higher-order Naga group including the other three. Consider, for example, the morphology of adjectives. In most Tibeto-Burman languages the adjective stem is used in predicate function, where it is inflected as a verb, but its use as a nominal modifier requires a nominalizing affix. Two such nominalizers, *gV- and *a-, are widespread across the family, but many individual languages have innovated a new construction. In the languages here we see the *a- prefix used in all four NWKC languages (although it appears to be being lost in Hrangkhoh). We see it also in Yimchunger, but Liangmai uses *gV- (*kə-*) combined with the nominalizing suffix *-bu* (in a construction very similar to that of Meitei, while Onaeme has an innovative suffix *-do*).

In other ways as well the languages described here neatly illustrate the basic morphological distinction between the Kuki-Chin and Naga languages. The former have complex paradigmatic morphology, while the latter lack paradigmatic patterns, while, like other languages of Northeast India, showing considerable syntagmatic complexity. In the NW Kuki-Chin languages in these volumes, we see remnants of the older post-verbal agreement paradigm retained in the negative conjugation, while the rest of the paradigm is built on the characteristic Kuki-Chin proclitic series. This supports the classification of the Kuki-Chin languages of Dima Hasao with their close cousins in Manipur, including Purum, and also Aimol, Anal, Lamkang, Monsang, Moyon, Tarao, and others.

Most or all of the languages described in these volumes illustrate morph syntactic phenomena which are common in languages of the Northeast, but less so in languages of the world in general, and thus of great interest to linguistic typology and theory. One typical Tibeto-Burman feature which we see abundantly illustrated in these volumes is the use of the productive clausal nominalization construction for nominal modification. Tibeto-Burman languages, in general, do not have “relative clauses” in the classical Indo-European sense, but many descriptions try to squeeze these languages into an Indo-European model (whether based on English or on Sanskrit), and treat the use of nominalizations as nominal modifiers as distinct from other functions of nominalization. It is past time that we return to the older practice of describing these languages in their own terms.

To give one example of a very current “hot topic” in linguistics which emerges from this work, we see many instances of “optional” ergative marking, where a transitive subject may or may not be marked with ergative case. (This is distinct from split ergative marking, where the presence or absence of ergative case is obligatorily determined by aspect or by the person of the transitive subject). This is a phenomenon which has only been noted in the

linguistic literature for the last 15 years or so, and is the subject of much current research. We see from these descriptions that the languages of the Northeast have much to offer for the study of this topic. (It is worth noting that; based on these descriptions, optional ergative marking in the Northeast occurs in all genealogical units, a fact which has previously not been clear).

Documentation of the 100 or 200 or whatever languages of Northeast India is a huge task, and will require the efforts of a great many linguists over many years. It is an inescapable fact that, if these 100 or 200 are all to ever be properly documented, the bulk of the work will have to be done by scholars working in the Northeast. Important contributions have been and will continue to be made by scholars from elsewhere in India and abroad, but these are only a small part of the work which needs to be done. There will never be sufficient participation from outside the Northeast to complete, or even make a serious dent in, the task before us. It is heartening to see local scholars stepping up shouldering the load.

Scott DeLancey
University of Oregon
19/02/2020

Editorial Note

With immense pleasure, we bring forward the book “The Morphology of Biate, Hrangkhoh, Khelma, Onaeme, Purum, Liangmai and Yimchunger” which is a collective research work on seven languages, namely Biate, Hrangkhoh, Khelma, spoken in the Dima Hasao district of Assam, Onaeme and Purum in Manipur, and Liangmai and Yimchunger in Nagaland. The Centre for Endangered Languages, Tezpur University, Assam, has taken the endeavour to document and research these endangered languages as a part of the research project on language documentation and revitalization.

The authors have presented their research work, in detail, as chapters in this book with great effort and hardship, as they ventured to very remote parts of northeast India, and the hilly terrain in a span of six fieldtrips. Once the manuscripts were ready the native speakers of each language were again brought to the University for a final round of data verification. The authors have carried out their research since 2016, and have already contributed Learner’s book for each of these languages in 2017, (except the one on Yimchunger) and thereafter, the ongoing grammar works in 3 volumes: Phonetics and Phonology, Morphology and Syntax. The Morphology volume, hence, is second in the series, which includes the morphological features and word-formation processes found in these languages. In the process of finalizing this volume, the authors have made a series of internal presentations at the centre, held many brainstorming sessions and a few researchers also presented some of the findings partially in some national and international conferences. With regard to the glossing of the data, the authors have mostly followed the Leipzig Glossing Rules and as and when the need arises for a new grammatical labelling an abbreviation was created (see the abbreviation list).

The languages researched and analyzed in this volume belong to the greater Kuki-Naga group of the Tibeto-Burman language family. The lexical resemblances and morphological features such as agreement marker, case, gender, numerals, tense and aspect, and reduplication and compounding, and few others, are, therefore, strikingly similar. As a general observation, we have noticed that most of the languages have two tense systems, Liangmai being an exception. The morphological typology is mostly agglutinating and sporadic presence of inflecting features.

In the first paper ‘Morphology of Biate’ the authors Daimalu Brahma and Raju Ram Boro have tried to highlight the basic morphological structure of the language along with other features. It is interesting to observe that the Biate language exhibits partly agglutinative and partly inflectional morphological typology. As most of the words are in disyllabic forms and prefixes ‘i-’ and ‘a-’ are added to every monosyllabic verb and noun respectively. They have also shown the future non-future division of the tense system of this language. Both proclitic and enclitic forms are also shown elaborately in this paper.

The second paper ‘Morphology and Morphological Aspects of Hrangkhoh’ authored by Monali Longmailai and Rima Saikia has extrapolated various word formation processes that are in operation in this language. This language has a very rich agreement system that shows agreement for both person and number. There are different agreement markers for both affirmative and negative sentences. In affirmative sentences, agreement precedes the main verb; in negative it follows the main verb. This language has also exhibited bare adjective forms which are used in isolation, but in sentences, the adjectival prefix ‘a-’ is always used before the head.

In the third paper ‘Morphology of Khelma’ the authors Pushpa Renu Bhattacharyya and Barshapriya Dutta too have highlighted the morphological typology, the types of morphemes including the very interesting deictic system with spatial differences like proximal and distal. They have described all the personal deixis, temporal deixis and spatial deixis along with many examples. This language too has shown the two-dimensional tense system of future and non-future.

The fourth paper ‘An Introduction to the Morphology of Onaeme’ authored by Bobita Sarangthem and Dulumani Das has shown us various morphological features of Onaeme. Unlike the Naga language, nominalization in Onaeme is undertaken by a suffix, not by a prefix. This language has also shown evidence of syncretism in the dative and locative cases. Interestingly this language has a distinctive feature for marking assertive or declarative sentences at the end with *-lo*, as was evident in many example sentences in the paper.

The Purum paper titled ‘Morphology of Purum’ authored by Elangbam Manimohon Meitei and Dhanapati Shougrakpam has also come up with some very thought-provoking morphological features such as the pre-verbal agreement marker for affirmative sentences and suffixal agreement marker for negation. Whereas the occurrence of cardinal form is always fixed at post noun position, the ordinals can occur before or after the nouns.

The sixth paper titled ‘Morphological description of Liangmai’ authored by Charengna Widinibou is comparatively a longer morphological description in this volume. The author is successful in describing the complex classifier system of this language. This language has also exhibited one of the captivating morphological characteristics i.e. the position of nouns and adjectives which is interchangeable and where an adjective can sometimes precede the noun and follow as well. Moreover, most of the polysyllabic words in Liangmai are the result of compounding.

The last paper of this volume i.e. ‘Morphology of Yimchunger’ authored by I. D. Raguibou and Dinkur Borah has brought out some very interesting morphological features of this language. Although, the morphological typology is the same as the other six languages of this volume, i.e. mostly agglutinating in nature, its number system, abstract noun formation

process and derivative adverbs are unique of its own. Interestingly, it has three number systems in pronominal constructions, abstract nouns are derived by reduplicating the adjective where nominalized *-rə* suffixes to the reduplicated form of an adjective. Similarly, adverbs in Yimchunger are derived from adjectives by adding the derivative suffix *-te*, as in *məzə* ‘bad’ *məzə-te* ‘badly’.

With all these very important linguistic insights for documentary and descriptive linguistics and also for language typology, we are confident that this volume would be a valuable addition for the language documenters particularly, and linguists as a whole.

Having said all these, it is our humble submission that due to many constraints such as the location of these languages in the remotest corners of the country, communication barriers, staff mobility for better workplaces in the middle of the project and inclusion and training of the newly recruited staff, getting them along with the works, administrative formalities, and most importantly the responsibilities of semester classes etc. have slightly slowed down the pace of the work time to time. Moreover, the local publishers with whom we have to publish our books lack the technical knowledge of linguistic signs, symbols, (read IPA symbols) and alignments etc., which is why we are not completely ruling out some typographical errors.

In the end, we, the editors, hope that the book will throw some lights and valuable insights to readers and researchers of linguistics with these varied linguistic features of these lesser documented and endangered TB languages from Northeast India, and open scope for future research for young linguists and enthusiastic members of the speech communities. Thank you.

Editors:

Arup Kumar Nath
 Monali Longmailai
 Dhanapati Shougrakpam
 The Centre for Endangered Languages,
 Tezpur University, Assam

Authors' Information:

Barshapriya Dutta (barshapriyadutta@gmail.com) worked as a field Assistant in the Centre for Endangered Languages (CFEL) Tezpur University, Assam. Her research interests include language documentation and sociolinguistics.

Bobita Sarangthem, PhD (bobitasarang@gmail.com) is an Assistant Professor at the Centre for Endangered Languages, Tezpur University. Her areas of interest are Tibeto-Burman Linguistics, Phonetics & Phonology, Language Documentation and Sociolinguistics.

Daimalu Brahma, PhD (daimalubrahma85@gmail.com) worked as a Research Associate in the Centre for Endangered Languages, Tezpur University. Currently, he works as an Assistant Professor at Barama College, Barama. His research interests include Morphology, Syntactic Typology and Word Formation Processes in Tibeto-Burman languages.

Dhanapati Shougrakpam, PhD (dhanapati.shougrakpam@gmail.com/dhanapati@curaj.ac.in) worked as an Assistant Professor in the Centre for Endangered Languages, Tezpur University, Assam. Her areas of interest are morphology, semantics, lexicography, descriptive linguistics and field linguistics. Currently, she is working at the Central University of Rajasthan as an Assistant Professor, Department of Linguistics since November 2019.

Dinkur Borah (dinkur123@gmail.com) is a Field Assistant in the Centre for Endangered Languages (CFEL) Tezpur University, Assam, India. His areas of interest are descriptive linguistics, Phono-tactics, Morpho-syntax, Theoretical linguistics, G-B theory to Minimalist Programme; Tibeto-Burman languages of NE India and Endangered Languages.

Dulumoni Das (93duludas@gmail.com) worked as a Field Assistant in the Centre for Endangered Languages, Tezpur University, Assam. Her areas of interest are Language Typology, Variation Studies etc.

Elangbam Manimohon Meitei, PhD (manielangbam8@gmail.com) is a Research Associate in the Centre for Endangered Languages, Tezpur University Assam. He earned his PhD in Linguistics from the Department of Linguistics, Manipur University. His areas of interest are morphology, phonology, field linguistics, syntax and sociolinguistics.

I.D. Raguibou, PhD (daimairagui@yahoo.com) is a Research Associate in the Centre for Endangered Languages (CFEL) Tezpur University, Assam, India. His areas of interest are Phonetics and Phonology, Tibeto-Burman languages of Northeast India and Endangered Languages.

Monali Longmailai, PhD (monalilong@gmail.com) worked as an Assistant Professor at the Centre for Endangered Languages, Tezpur University, Assam. Her research interests include Morphosyntax, Areal Typology, Ethnolinguistics, Language Documentation and Tibeto-Burman languages of northeast India. Currently, she works in the Department of Linguistics, Assam University, Silchar.

Pushpa Renu Bhattacharyya, PhD (pushparb@tezu.ernet.in) is a Research Associate in the Centre for Endangered Languages (CFEL) Tezpur University, Assam. Her research interests include language documentation and description.

Raju Ram Boro (rrboro1990@gmail.com) is a Field Assistant in the Centre for Endangered Languages (CFEL) Tezpur University, Assam. His research interests include Generative Syntax and Phonology.

Rima Saikia (rimasaikia422@gmail.com) is a Field Assistant in the Centre for Endangered Languages, Tezpur University. Her areas of interest are Field Linguistics, Descriptive Linguistics with a special focus on Phonology, Morphology, Morph-syntax and Sociolinguistics.

Widinibou Charengna, PhD (widinibou@gmail.com) is working as a Research Associate in the Centre for Endangered Languages, Tezpur University. His prime research interest includes *Phonology, Morphology and descriptive Linguistics* of endangered languages of Tibeto-Burman with a special interest in Zeme-Naga group spoken in North-east India.