

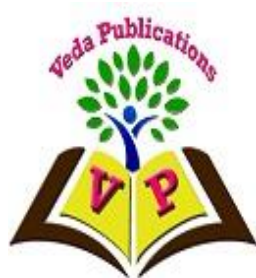


PLURAL FORMATION IN TAI AHOM: A CRITICALLY ENDANGERED LANGUAGE OF ASSAM

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ABSTRACT



Tai Ahom is one of the critically endangered languages of Assam. It belongs to Tai-Kadai sub family of languages of the Indo-Chinese family of languages (Grierson, 1903). The Tai Ahom speakers are mainly found in Patsaku, Parijat, Bokota i.e., Deodhai villages and Aakhaya of Sivsagar district. The present paper attempts to focus on the number in Tai Ahom. Number is not grammatically significant in the language, i.e., there is no subject predicate agreement as far as number is concerned. In other words, Tai Ahom contrasts two numbers: (i) singular and (ii) plural. Morphologically, the singular form of noun is unmarked however the plurality is expressed by means of postposition or reduplication.

Keywords: *Tai Ahom, Tibeto-Burman, Number, Singular, Plural, Sivsagar.*



1. INTRODUCTION

The Ahom language is one of the languages of Tai groups belonging to Tai-Kadai family of languages/Siamese-Chinese family of the Indo-Chinese forms of speech (Grierson, 1903) Ahom were the first Tai group in Assam led by Sukapha a Tai prince from Muang Mao. The Ahoms were gradually shifting to the majority Hindu population, after the sixteenth century (Morey, 2005). The Ahoms use Assamese language in their daily life, although the Ahom language is used in religious chants and literary materials¹.

As in many other Sino-Tibetan languages, Tai Ahom contrasts two numbers: (i) singular and (ii) plural. Morphologically, the singular form of noun is unmarked however the plurality is expressed by means of postposition or reduplication.

2.1. PLURALISATION OF PERSONAL PRONOUNS

In Tai Ahom plurality of personal pronoun are expressed with the help of new morphemes. It is a typical feature found in almost all the Tai languages. The expression of plurality in Tai Ahom is shown in the table no. 1 –

Person	Tai Ahom	Gloss(Sng)	Tai Ahom	Gloss(PL)
First	/kəo/	'I'	/rao/	'we'
Second	/mau/	'You'	/su/	'You'
Third	/man/	'He/She'	/k ^h ao/	'They'
	/nai/	'It'		

Table No. 1 pluralisation of personal pronoun

¹Not spoken in daily life, used in religious chants and literary materials- 'Ethnologue language of the world'.

Some of the examples are shown as -

a./lūk haŋ-kəo/ 'my child'

child my

b./lūk rao nam-nam/ 'our children'

child our PL

c./rēn man/ 'his house'

house his

d./rēn k^how nam-nam/ 'their houses'

house their PL

2.2.PLURALISATION OF DEMONSTRATIVE PRONOUN

In Tai Ahom pluralisation of demonstrative pronoun are expressed with different morphemes and no addition of affixes with the singular form. The marker /nai/ for 'this' and /nan/ for 'these', 'that', 'those' respectively and numerals are also use for the pluralisation. Some of the examples are illustrated as-

e./pi nai/ 'this pen'

pen this

f./nan rēn ha haŋ-kəo/ 'these are my five houses'

these house N my

g./pi nan/ 'that pen'

pen that

h./lik k^hao nan/ 'those books'

book PL those

2.3. NUMERALS AS PLURAL WORD

Like many other Tibeto-burman languages, Tai Ahom also show plurality of noun with the help of numerals. Here, are some of the examples where the



numerals follows the noun and precede the classifier. They are shown as-

i. /pu sip kɔ/ 'ten grandfathers'

grandfather N CL

j. /ja pet kɔ/ 'eight grandmother'

grandmother N CL

k. /paŋ-tai sɔŋ tu/ 'two rabbits'

rabbit N CL

l. /nām-tao sɔŋ luk/ 'two jars'

jar N CL

2.4. QUANTIFIERS AS PLURAL WORDS

Like numeral, Tai Ahom also express plurality of noun by using the quantifiers, where quantifier follows the noun. It plays an important role for the process of pluralisation as in many other languages of the world. They are exemplified as-

m. /tun-mai nam nam/ 'many trees'

tree many

n. /pap-lik taŋ-lai/ 'all books'

book all

o. /pap-lik chon/ 'a few book'

book few

p. /phuŋ c^haŋ/ 'herd of elephants'

herd elephant

q. /tun-mai chon-luŋ/ 'some trees'

tree some

2.5. REDUPLICATION OF INTERROGATIVE PRONOUNS

Reduplication of interrogative pronouns in Tai Ahom expresses the plurality. They are illustrated as-

r. /ka-saŋ ka-saŋ/ 'what all'

what what

s. /p^hau p^hau/ 'who all'

who who

t. /ti-t^hau ti-t^hau/ 'where all'

where where

2.6. PLURALISATION OF HUMAN NOUN

In Tai Ahom pluralisation of human noun is expressed with the help of suffixation i.e. /k^hao/ is suffixed with the noun. They are shown in the table no. 2,3,4,5 & 6 -

Tai Ahom	Gloss
/kun k ^h ao/ man PL	'men'
/p ^h u-iŋ k ^h ao/ woman PL	'women'
Tai Ahom	Gloss
/lūk-chai k ^h ao/ boy PL	'boys'

Table No.2 Pluralisation of human noun

2.7. Pluralisation of non-human noun

Like human noun, non-human noun also use the suffix /k^hao/ to express the plurality. They are shown in the table no. 3-

**2.7.1. Animals**

Tai Ahom(PL)	English(PL)
/tu-mâ k ^h ao/ CL dog PL	'dogs'
/tu-mio k ^h ao/ CL cat PL	'cats'
/tu-hu k ^h ao/- CL cow PL	'cows'

Table No. 3 Pluralisation of animals

2.7.2. Birds

Tai Ahom(PL)	English(PL)
/nūk-kā k ^h ao/ CL crow PL	'crows'
/nūk-tit k ^h ao/ CL parrot PL	'parrots'
/nūk-chok k ^h ao/ CL sparrows PL	'sparrows'

Table No.4 Pluralisation of birds

2.7.3. Insects

Tai Ahom(PL)	English(PL)
/mut k ^h ao/ ant PL	'ants'
/juŋ k ^h ao/ mosquito PL	'mosquitoes'

Table No. 5 Pluralisation of insects

2.7.4. Inanimate

Tai Ahom(PL)	English(PL)
/lik k ^h ao/ book PL	'books'
/chaŋ-buŋ k ^h ao/ slate PL	'slates'

Table No. 6 Pluralisation of inanimate

2.8. Pluralisation by means of reduplication

In Tai Ahom Plurality is also express by means of reduplication. Reduplication is one of the typical features of the Tai languages. In Tai Ahom /nam-nam/ is use for pluralisation of the noun. They are show in the table no. 7 –



Tai Ahom	Gloss
/lūk nam-nam/ child PL	'children'
/rēn nam-nam/ house PL	'houses'

Table No. 7 Pluralisation by means of reduplication

2.9. Pluralisation of kinship terms

In Tai Ahom, pluralisations of kinship terms are expressed with the help of suffixation. Where, the suffix *-/k^hao/* follows the noun. They are shown in the table no. 8 –

Tai Ahom	Gloss
/nuŋ-saow k ^h ao/ sister PL	'sisters'
/nuŋ-chai k ^h ao/ brother PL	'brothers'
/mi k ^h ao/ wife PL	'wives'

Table No. 8 Pluralisation of kinship terms

3. CONCLUSION

Tai Ahom is a group of people living in Assam and Arunachal. The census of India does not provide particular census data for them. Tai-Ahom language is found only in written record called Buranji and a very less number of people of the community know the oral as well as the written form of the language.

Although, at present effort has made by the few people of the community to revive this language as a spoken language. This paper is about the numbers in Tai Ahom. From the above analysis, the conclusions may be drawn:

1. It is well known fact that Tai group of languages are isolating, so almost all the words are monosyllabic in nature.
2. As in many other Sino-Tibetan languages, Tai Ahom contrasts two numbers: (i) singular and (ii) plural. Morphologically, the singular form of noun is unmarked however the plurality is expressed by means of postposition or reduplication.
3. In Tai Ahom complete new morphemes are used to express the plurality of the personal pronouns.
4. Demonstrative pronouns in Tai Ahom are expressed with the help of different morphemes and no addition of affixes is found with the singular form. The marker */nai/* for 'this' and */nan/* for 'these', 'that', 'those' respectively and numerals are also used for the pluralisation of the noun.
5. In Tai Ahom plurality is expressed with the help of numerals . Where numerals follows the noun.
6. Like numerals, quantifiers also plays an important role in plural formation in Tai languages.
7. Reduplication of interrogative pronouns also expresses the plurality in Tai Ahom language.
8. Pluralisation of human and non-human noun are expressed with help of suffixation, i.e. */k^hao/* is suffixed with the noun.



9. In Tai Ahom plurality is also expressed with the help of reduplication, /*nam-nam*/ is used to express the plurality, which follows the noun.
10. Pluraliation of kinship terms in Tai Ahom are also expressed by the suffix /*k'hao*/.

ABBREVIATIONS

Sng	=Singular
PL	= Plural
CL	= Classifier
N	= Numeral

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