

Case Marking System in Chiru and Kom

Salam Brojen Singh

North Eastern Regional Language Centre, Guwahati

Abstract

Chiru is a language belongs to Tibeto-Burman group of languages. It is spoken by Chiru people of Manipur. It attained the status of Scheduled Tribe (ST) in 1957. As per the Census of 2011, their population is 8599. Kom is a language spoken by Kom people, a recognized tribe of Manipur. The population of Kom is 16463 (Census of India, 2001), who settled primarily in 44 villages of Manipur. This language belongs to old Kuki sub-group of Kuki-Chin of Tibeto-Burman language family (Grierson, 1904, pp. 245). Chiru has got seven case markers for seven cases, i.e., nominative, genitive, accusative, instrumental, locative, ablative and associative. However, more and above these seven cases one more case, i.e., dative is seen in Kom language, which makes the existence of eight cases in Kom. The nominative and instrumental case markers are homophonous in Kom. This research study is based on the data collected from Withou Chiru and Khoirentak Kom villages of Manipur. This paper will present a detailed picture of the case marking systems in these two languages.

Keywords: case, nominative, dative, genitive, accusative, locative, ablative, associative, dative, instrumental

1. Introduction

Both the languages, i.e. Chiru and Kom possess the genetic features of Tibeto-Burman languages. The word order in these languages is Subject-Object-Verb (SOV) and pronominal marking on verb is prominent in these languages. By affixation, different word classes can be formed. Both the languages are in Kuki-Chin group of Tibeto-Burman language family (Grierson, 1904). Chiru has seven cases whereas Kom has got eight cases. Different linguists discussed case in their works. Barry Blake defined case as “a system of marking dependent nouns for the type of relationship they bear to their heads (1994, 2001)”. “Cases are inflected forms for nouns which fit them for participation in key constructions relative to verbs” (Hockett, 1985). Crystal (1985) defined case as “a grammatical category used in the analysis of word classes to identify the syntactic relationship between words in a sentence through contrasts as nominative, accusative etc.” By affixing the case markers to the noun or pronoun, different word categories can be formed. Majority of the Tibeto-Burman languages have an established case system.

2. Objectives of the research work

- (a) To discuss about the case marking system in Chiru and Kom languages.
- (b) To study the different case markers with examples.

3. Research Methodology

The field work for the data collection was done at Waithou Chiru village of Imphal East, Manipur; and

for Kom, the same was done in Khoirentak Khunou village in Churachandpur district of Manipur. Dialect variation can be seen among the Kom speakers of different villages. The study is particularly based on the data collected from the above mentioned village, which is the oldest and one of the largest Kom villages in Manipur. For the study, questionnaire along with a list of vocabularies and sentences were prepared in advanced and the equivalent of the target languages were collected. The informants were from different age-groups. Besides the data collection from the primary source, some available secondary sources (in Kom) were also discussed and cross verified. For convenience, International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) fonts were used to transcribe the Chiru and Kom data. Electronic gadgets were used for the data collection. The collected data was analysed to establish the case in these two languages.

4. Discussion

In Chiru, seven case markers are found, i.e., nominative **-nà**, accusative **-hi**, genitive **ka-**, **naŋ-**, **a-**, **na-**, **amani-**, instrumental **-le**, locative **-a**, ablative **-aputa**, associative **-le**. In this language, case is expressed by suffixation except in genitive, it is opposite. The 1st, 2nd and 3rd person, singular and plural pronominal prefixes are affixed to express genitive case in this language. Of these seven case markers, nominative, accusative and locative case markers are not obligatory. In some cases without these three case markers (nominative, accusative and locative) also, the subject can convey the intended meaning. In Kom, eight cases are seen, i.e., nominative, accusative, genitive, instrumental, locative, ablative, associative and dative for which the suffixes **-in**, **-mo**, **-ta**, **-in**, **-la**, **-inp^hut**, **-le** and **-hneŋga** mark the cases respectively. The cases are expressed by suffixation. In this language the case markers for the cases, that is, nominative and instrumental have been marked by a homophonous case marker **-in**, which is usually observed in other Tibeto-Burman languages, e.g., Manipuri, where both nominative and instrumental case are marked by **-na**. Though dative case has not been observed in Chiru, its presence is seen in Kom, and the case marker **-hneŋga** marks it. At syntactic level, this case takes the role of an indirect object and beneficiary to a verb. In this language, the case marker **-la** is used to mark the locative case. However, this case plays only one semantic role, i.e. place dimension, not as could be seen in most of other languages under the same family. To denote the semantic role of time dimension, it uses another suffix **-a** in this language. Associative case is denoted by the case marker **-le** which shows an action that has been done in conjunction with another person. The following table shows the case markers found in Chiru and Kom languages.

Chiru		Kom	
Case	Case markers	Case	Case markers
Nominative	-nà	Nominative	-in
Accusative	-hi	Accusative	-mo
Genitive	kà-, nàŋ-, à-, na-, àmàni-	Genitive	-ta
Instrumental	-le	Instrumental	-in
Locative	-a	Locative	-la
Ablative	-aputa	Ablative	-inp ^h ut
Associative	-le	Associative	-le
		Dative	-hneŋga

Table 1: Case markers of Chiru and Kom

4.1 Nominative

In Chiru, the suffix **-nà** is used to denote the nominative case and it sometimes gives more emphasis to the action of the subject. In the matter of intransitive verbs, it is not imperative (example 3); however it is, when the verb is transitive. In stative verbs also, the marker is used (example 2). The same applies in Kom also. In this language, it is indicated by the case marker **-in**. In sentences, if the nominative indicator **-nà** is used irrespective of transitive or intransitive verb, it will express the specifier's meaning. The below examples highlight this.

Chiru

1. àma-nà bu nek
he-NOM. rice eat
'He eats rice'
3. àma-nà à-zet
he-NOM. pref.-know
'He knows'

Kom

2. jack-in ama kà-wuk
santa-NOM. he/she PP-beat
'Jack beats him/her'
4. àma-in bu à-sak
he/she-NOM. rice PP-eat
'He/she eats rice'

4.2 Accusative

The object of the transitive verb is specified by the accusative case. The accusative case suffix is **-hi** in Chiru and in Kom it is **-mo**. It is not obligatorily used. It makes the object more specific in comparison with the object without this marker. In Kom, the accusative case marker and the interrogative marker are homophonous but different in their usage. Let's observe the examples.

Chiru

1. kài-nà àma-hi kà-zem
I-NOM. he-ACC. pref.-beat
'I beat him'
3. kài-nà àma-hi numkopok
I-NOM. he-ACC. pref.-love
'I love him'

Kom

2. àma-in jack-mo à-wuk
he/she-NOM jack-ACC PP-beat
'He/she beats Jack'
4. kei àma-mo kàmànhrèt
I he/she-ACC know
'I know him/her'

4.3 Genitive

In Chiru, by affixing the pronominal prefixes **kà-** (1st person sg.), **nàŋ-** (2nd person sg/pl.), **à-** (3rd person sg.) **na-** (1st person pl.) and **àmàni-** (3rd person pl.) to the noun, genitive is formed; in Kom, the genitive marker is **-tà**. It shows the possessiveness for something. It can be seen in the examples 1-4.

Chiru

1. m àhi àm àni-pon-keŋ
this GEN-cloth-COP.
'This is their cloth'
3. m àhi lairik-hi k àtà-keŋ
this book-DET me-COP.
'This book belongs to me'

Kom

2. hiwa lekha-hi n àŋ k à-e
this book-DET PRO-GEN AUX
'This book is yours'
4. pensil-hi kaj-t à k à-e
pencil-DET PRO-GEN AUX
'This is my pencil'

4.4 Instrumental

The Instrumental case marker in Chiru is **-le**; in Kom, it is **-in**. It is used to highlight the instrument used by the agent (noun or pronoun) who carried out the activity. It carries the substance of 'with'. This is highlighted in the examples (1-4).

Chiru	Kom
1. àma-nà càndru-k ^h a ràmo-le à-zem He-NOM kanta-ACC stick-INST pref.-beat 'He beats Kanta with stick'	2. àma pen-in cithi à-sun he/she pen-INST letter PP-write 'He/She writes a letter with pen'
3. kài-nà àkài-k ^h a sài-le kà-thàt I-NOM tiger-ACC spear-INST pref.-kill 'I kill the tiger with a spear'	4. àma stik-in jack-mo à-wuk he/she stick-INST Jack-ACC PP-beat 'He/she beats Jack with stick'

4.5 Locative

This case indicates the location of an object or action. In Chiru, the suffix **-a** is used to mark the case, whereas in Kom the suffix **-là~ra~ma~na~nà** (occur as allomorph) denotes it. The following examples (1-4) highlight this.

Chiru	Kom
1. màk ^h o kolom-kho tebàl-a om that pen-DET table-LOC COP 'That pen is on the table'	2. suga-in lekh-à tebàl-là à-da suga-NOM book table-LOC PP-keep 'Suga keeps the book on the table'
3. àma bàzar-a se he market-LOC go 'He goes to market'	4. àmani mapum-ma kà-se sik-hàj they Mapum-LOC PRO-go FUT-SUFF 'They will go to Mapum'

In Kom, this case marker possesses only one semantic role, i.e., place dimension, in contrast as seen in many Tibeto-Burman languages.

4.6 Ablative

In Chiru, the ablative case is marked by the suffix **-aputa**, whereas in Kom it is marked by the suffix **-inphut**. The ablative case shows the source from where an activity starts. Besides, in some cases it carries the meaning of separation, expulsion etc. It is observed in the examples (1-4).

Chiru	Kom
1. àma k ^h urai-aputa imp ^h al ava-keŋ he khurai-ABL imp ^h al come-	2. kàj mapum-à-inphut kà-hoŋ-eŋ I mapum-LOC-ABL PP-come-ASP

COP

‘He comes from Khurai to Imphal’

3. àma ofis-aputa ava-keṇ
he office-ABL come-COP
‘He comes from the office’

‘I come from Mapum’

4. àma –le mapum-à-inphut kà-hoṇ
he/she mapum-LOC-ABL PP -come
‘He/She comes from Mapum’

4.7 Associative

The associative case in Chiru is shown by the suffix **–le**. When the agent is doing an activity with another individual, the suffix is used. In Kom too, the associative case is denoted by the suffix **–le**. The examples (1-4) substantiate the statement.

Chiru

1. kài-nà bu-hi ṇa-le kà-nek
I-nom. rice-DET fish-ASSO pref.-
eat
‘I eat rice with fish’
3. kài-nà àma-le bazar-a kà-se
I-nom. he-ASSO market-LOC pref.-
go
‘I went to the market with him’

Kom

2. kàj àma-le lekha kàn-tàj
I he/she-ASSO book PRO-read
‘I read book with him/her’
4. kàj kà-pa-le kàjthel kàn-se
I PP-father-ASSO market PRO-go
‘I go to market with my brother’

4.8 Dative

In Kom, dative case is marked by the suffix **-hneṇṇa**. This case functions as indirect object and beneficiary to a verb at syntactic level in this language. However, in Chiru, this case is not seen. The following examples show the case in Kom.

Kom

1. kàj-in àma-hneṇṇa menggo inkhàt kà-pek
I-NOM he/she-DAT mango one PRO-give
‘I gave him/her one mango’
2. kà-nu-in kàj--hneṇṇa bu á-pek-eṇ
PP-mother-NOM I-DAT rice PRO-give-AUX
‘My mother gives me rice’
3. àma-hneṇṇa se-ro
he/she-DAT go-IMP
‘Go to him/her’

5. Results

The analysis concludes that in Chiru there are seven cases. In this language, the cases are characterized by suffixes, except in genitive which is distinguished by the 1st, 2nd and 3rd person, singular and plural pronominal prefixes. The sentences with the nominative marker **-nà** irrespective of transitive or intransitive verb denotes the meaning of specifier (specified the noun among the other whereas sentences

without nominative marker **-nà** simply express the habitual meaning. The object of the transitive verb is specified by the accusative case. In Kom language, eight cases are seen, i.e., nominative, genitive, accusative, instrumental, locative, ablative and associative and dative. While the accusative case suffix in Chiru is **-hi** and in Kom it is **-mo**. In Kom, this case marker specifies the object of the transitive verb, which normally precedes the verb. In contrary to the usual suffixation of case markers, in Chiru the genitive case is indicated by the prefixes, i.e., **kà-** (1st person sg.), **nàŋ-** (2nd person sg/pl.), **à-** (3rd person sg.) **na-** (1st person pl.) and **àmàni-** (3rd person pl.) to the noun. In Chiru the locative marker takes two semantic roles, i.e. place dimension and time dimension, however in Kom it makes only one semantic role of the place dimension. In Kom, the dative case markers are prominently seen; but this case is not seen in Chiru. In both the languages, the associative case marker is **-le**.

6. Conclusion

The information presented above leads to the conclusion that the in Chiru, seven cases, i.e., nominative, accusative, ablative, genitive, associative, instrumental and locative are found, whereas in Kom, besides the above cases, the dative case is also found, totalling it to eight. In these languages, the case markers for the three cases, i.e. nominative, accusative and locative are not completely obligatory. Without these three case markers (nominative, accusative and locative) also, the agent can convey the intended meaning. Double case marking is not seen in these languages.

7. Abbreviations used

NOM – Nominative	FUT – Future
ACC – Accusative	ABL – Ablative
ASP – Aspect	PRO – Pronoun
GEN – Genitive	ASSO – Associative
DET – Determiner	PP – Pronominal prefix
AUX – Auxiliary	DAT – Dative
PL – Plural	IMP – Imperative
INST – Instrumental	FUT. SUFF – Future suffix
COP – Copula	

8. References

1. Aimol, Ch. Damrenghang (2007). *A Descriptive Grammar of Kom*, PhD Dissertation, Manipur University, Imphal.
2. Aimol, Ch. Damrenghang (2009). *A Comparative Study of Kom and Aimol Numerals*, North East Indian Linguistics, pp 162-172,
3. Anderson, Stephen. (1971). *The Grammar of Case: Towards a Localistic Theory*, Cambridge University Press.
4. Bradley, D. (1997). *Tibeto-Burman Languages and Classification papers in Southeast Asian Linguistics*, 14, 1-71.
5. Brojen Singh, S. (2007). *Chiru Grammar*, Unpublished Ph.D Dissertation, Manipur University.
6. Grierson, G.A. (1904). *Linguistics Survey of India*, Vol. 3. Part III, Reprint, 1967, Motilal Banarasidas, Delhi.

7. Mechek Sampar Awan. (2017). *Morphology and Phonology of Chiru*, PhD Dissertation, Assam University, Silchar.
8. Wary, Pinki. (2021). *A Descriptive Grammar of Dukpa: An Endangered Language of West Bengal*. PhD Dissertation, Silchar: Assam University.