

Morphology of Kokborok: An overview of Morphemes

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Abstract:

Kokborok, the indigenous language of the Tripuri people of Northeast India, exhibits a rich and systematic morphological structure that reflects its Tibeto-Burman linguistic heritage. Morphemes in Kokborok function as the smallest meaningful units of language and play a significant role in word formation, grammatical expression, and semantic interpretation. This study examines the types and functions of morphemes in Kokborok, including free and bound morphemes, inflectional and derivational processes, and the use of affixation in sentence construction. The analysis highlights how prefixes, suffixes, and reduplication contribute to tense marking, plurality, possession, and lexical expansion. By exploring the morphological patterns of Kokborok, the study aims to contribute to the documentation and preservation of the language while also enhancing understanding of the structural characteristics of Tibeto-Burman languages. The findings demonstrate that Kokborok morphology is both flexible and culturally embedded, reflecting the linguistic identity and communicative practices of its speakers.

Keywords: Kokborok, Morpheme, Morphology, Tibeto-Burman Language, Affixation

1. Introduction:

Language is vital for humanity and encompasses far more than mere words. It serves as a powerful tool for communication, the expression of identity, connection, and understanding. In essence, language transcends mere spoken words; it embodies our humanity and facilitates profound connections with others and the world we inhabit. Each language signifies a distinct community. Every language has its own unique features, beauty and structure. As a language develops, the community that speaks it also grows and flourishes.

Kokborok is one kind of language. It is one of the state languages of the Tripura government. Tripura is a small hilly state in Northeast India. Tripura has 19 recognized indigenous tribes, each with their own identity, language, and culture. But collectively known as the Tripuri people or Tiparasa. Among the 19 indigenous tribes of Tripura, the majority belong to the Tripuri, Reang and other groups and their native language is Kokborok. Kokborok literally means “language of the Borok(people). It belongs to the Tibeto-Burman branch of the Sino-Tibetan language family. The Kokborok language is spoken not only in the state of Tripura but also in the states of Assam and Mizoram and the neighbouring countries of Bangladesh and Myanmar also. According to glottochronology, Kokborok is estimated to be between 1200 and 1400 years old. This means Kokborok is one of the ancient indigenous languages of the Indian subcontinent, spoken long before Indo-Aryan languages like Bengali arrived in the region. But

Kokborok traditionally has no native script of its own. It is a rich spoken language with ancient roots, now being expressed in borrowed scripts like Bengali and Roman.

“Morphology” is one of the main branches of linguistics. The word “linguistic” relates to language or the scientific study of language. The word “morphology” comes from Greek. The word ‘morphology’ is formed by combining two parts, ‘morph’ and ‘ology’. ‘Morph’ means ‘structure/form’, and ‘ology’ means ‘study/knowledge’. So “morphology is the scientific study of words”. That means it doesn’t study all aspects of words (like their meaning in sentences – that’s semantics), but it focuses on how words are built from smaller meaningful units (morphemes). For example:-

Kwlainai (fallen) = kw + lai + nai (prefix + root + suffix)

The word 'kwchanai' is broken into its three morphemes. In short, morphology is the study of morphemes. A language is made up of words. Morphology examines what it takes to make words within a language. A morpheme is the smallest unit of meaning in a language. In other words, morphology is like the “science”, and morphemes are the “building blocks” it examines. The English word “morpheme” is called “mangchwlwi” in the Kokborok language. A morpheme is an important part of morphology.

Materials and methods: While researching Morpheme eba mangchwlwi(Kokborok term),i had to use both primary and secondary methods There are not so many grammar books written in Kokborok language. And the grammar books written in the Kokborok language do not contain detailed discussions about Morpheme. That’s why primary sources have been used more. This information has been collected to understand the role of our writer in improving Kokborok grammar.Many prominent writers who wrote about Kokborok grammar are no longer in this worldBut the books written by them are collected. kwbangma swikwrwngrok borokni bijapni lairemo swikwrwngrokni samung-humungni kokthumno narwgui tongbaikha.Amo ahai bijapnibo kokthum naharjakha. Tei baksa baksa Swikwrwngjwkrok tabukbo borokni swimungni phanno phunugui tongkhu.Borok bai sak sak malaiui tei baksa bai mobile twi bo kwrngui nangmani kokthum thumjakha.

2. Morpheme and its difference types:

All languages have morphemes in them. Kokborok is also a language, so there is a morpheme here also. Because a language is made up of its words. The word is 'morpheme', or 'morpheme' is the word. Morphology examines how words are formed within a language. If morphology examines the words in a language, then it is necessary to first look at what those words are. Words are the smallest, but they have meaning.

A word can be added before, after, and in the middle. By morphology we mean the word. The position of the word can be changed. There are two types of words: one is simple words, and the other is complex words. Simple words cannot be divided because there is only one morpheme each. But complex words can have more than one or two morphemes. That’s why these words can be divided. So we can say that both simple words and complex words are morphemes. An example of this is given below:

- **Swi (Dog):** It’s a simple word. This word cannot be divided any further, or it would lose its meaning if divided.
- **Swinai (Writer):** The word 'writer' is a complex word. Here, 'swi' is the verb and '-nai' is the suffix.
- **Tokbak (one kind of bird):** It’s a complex word. There are two root verbs here.
- **Mai-twk (Rice Pot):** It’s a complex word but a noun. and it has its own meaning.

In a word, words are made with morphemes.

2.1 Morpheme(Mangchwlwi):

Before discussing the morpheme and its types, it is important to know what a morpheme is. The study of linguistics is the scientific investigation of language with a focus on the properties and characteristics of a language. Language structure is divided into phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics. Morphology investigates the formation of words in a language. “A morpheme is the smallest unit of language that has meaning and is used to form words.” It cannot be further divided into smaller meaningful parts. A morpheme can be a word or a part of a word. A morpheme is the smallest unit in a language. This unit may or may not have a meaning.

For example: Sw+lai+nai (Translator)

Here, Sw-Morpheme

lai-morpheme

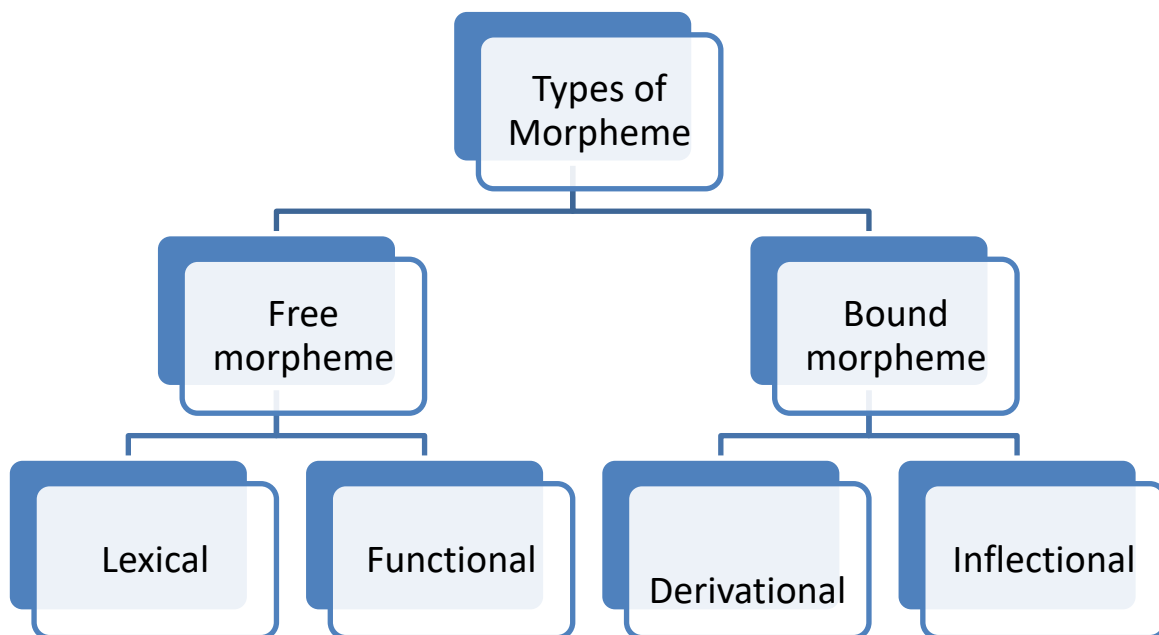
nai-Morpheme

Sw-lai-nai- It’s a word, but there are three morphemes here. Although the smallest unit of a word is called a morpheme, there is a difference between a word and a morpheme. A word will have some meaning, but a morpheme may or may not have a meaning. For example:Chwlarok (boys)-

It’s one word, but there are two morphemes here. One is “Chwla” and another is “rok”. “Chwla” has meaning, but “-rok” has no meaning.

2.2.Types of Morpheme:

There are two types of Morpheme. One is Free morpheme or yakarjak manchwlwi(Kokborok term) and another is Bound morpheme or khajak mangchwlwi (Kokborok term). But free morpheme can also be divided into two parts. Lexical(meaning) morpheme and Functiona (Grammatical) morpheme. Just as Free morpheme can be divided into two parts, bound morpheme can also be divided into two parts. Such as Derivational and Inflectional morpheme.



2.2.1. Free Morpheme:

A Free morpheme or yakarjak mangchwlwi is the smallest meaningful unit of a language that can stand

alone as an independent word without needing to be attached to another morpheme. There will be only one morpheme or one word here. Free morpheme can also be called root. Not only that, free morpheme can be called a simple word.

For example: Swi, Tok, Bijap etc

Here “swi” (the dog) is a free morpheme word. This is a noun, but this word cannot be divided, otherwise it will lose its meaning.

Similarly, “Tok(a bird)” and “Bijap(A book)” are also examples of free morpheme words. These words can show their meanings in a sentence without help any other words.

Free morphemes can be further divided into two groups.

2.2.1.1 Lexical morpheme (meaning)

2.2.1.2 Functional morpheme (Grammatical)

2.2.1.1 Lexical morpheme:

A lexical morpheme is a content word that carries the core meaning in a sentence and refers to objects, actions, qualities, or concepts. By Lexical we mean meaning. This is a part of free morpheme. Lexical morpheme is an independent word. We also call it open class. Therefore, another word with a new meaning can be created by combining it with another word. Lexical morpheme may be a noun, a verb and an adjective. Examples are given below:

Mung(Noun): Aming(A cat)

Borok (A man)

Khwlai(Verb): Tan(To cut)

Cha(To eat)

Goron(Adjective): Naithok(Beautiful)

Kolok(long)

2.2.1.2 Functional morpheme (Grammatical):

A functional morpheme is a morpheme that has little to no lexical meaning on its own but serves a grammatical function in a sentence. These morphemes help structure sentences rather than add new content. Functional morpheme cannot form new words with new meanings because it is a “closed class words”.

Pronoun: Ang(i), Nwng(you)

Conjunctions : Tei(and), Phiyaba(but), eba(or)

Preposition: Saka(on), Tola (under), kwchar(in) etc.

2.2.2 Bound Morpheme:

Bound morpheme is the smallest meaningful unit of a language which cannot stand alone and must attach to another word. A word is considered a meaningful word when combined with another morpheme or root verb. For examples: -rok, -ya, -song etc. In Kokborok language, “-rok, -ya, -song” are examples of bound morphemes. A bound morpheme is a word part that cannot stand alone or convey meaning by itself.

-rok

In the Kokborok language, the suffix “-rok’ is used as a plural marker. However, its use is restricted mainly to nouns that refer to animals. When -rok is added to an animal noun, it indicates plurality-meaning “more than one”.

Ex: Tokrok(Bird’s),

Swirok (dog's)

Amingrok(Cat's).

But when “-rok” is added to human relation terms (like father, mother brother, etc), it does not indicate plural. In such cases, the words remains singular in meaning.

Examples:

i)Kumui/brother in low (singular)

Kumuirok/brother in low (still singular)

ii) Bwkra/father in low (singular)

Bwkrarok/father in low (still singular)

Summary Rule

Category	Use of -rok	Meaning
Animal nouns	Marks plural	“More than one”
Human relation terms	Stays singular	“one person”

-ya

In kokborok ,”-ya” is also a bound morpheme that functions as a negative marker.

Examples:

Kosomya/Not black

Kwthangya/Not alive

Kwchangya/Not cold.

-song

The suffix “-song”, which is indeed used as a plural marker, but specially for human relation terms.

Examples:

Babu-song/ fathers

Ama-song/ mothers

Bai-song/ sisters

A bound morpheme is a grammatical unit that cannot stand alone and must be attached to a root word to convey meaning. In Kokborok, bound morphemes are used to show grammatical functions such as plurality and negation.

Bound Morpheme can be further divided into two parts:

2.2.2.1 Derivational Morpheme

2.2.2.2 Inflectional Morpheme

2.2.2.1 Derivational Morpheme:

A derivational morpheme is a type of affix, either a prefix or a suffix, that generates a new word or alters the grammatical category (part of speech) or meaning of a base word. When a derivational morpheme is added to a verb root, it typically produces a meaningful, independent word. Such morphemes can function as either prefixes or suffixes. The position of derivational morphemes is not restricted to just one location. They may appear before the root, altering the meaning and sometimes the word class. Alternatively, they can follow the root, often resulting in a change of word class. A derivational morpheme can function as a noun, adjective, verb, or adverb. Examples are provided below:

Adjective words can be formed by adding an infix word before a verb.

Verb	Adjective
Koi /to bend	ko-koi /bent
khwi /to sour	kw-khwi/sour

Ran / dry	kw-ran /dry
Derivation of nouns with --jak	
Verb	Adjective
Kan/to wear	kan-jak /worn
chwna /to shine	chwna-jak /Shiny
Khok/steal	Khok-jak /stolen
Derivation of nouns with –mung	
Verb	Noun
Cha /to eat	Cha-mung /eater
Thu/to sleep	Thu-mung/sleep
Phui/uprooted	Phui-mung/uprooter
Derivation of nouns with –nai	
Verb	Noun
Thwng /play	Thwngnai/play
Kiphil/to return	kiphilnai/returner
Suk/to bite	suknai/biter
Derivation of nouns with –ma	
Verb	Noun
Rik/to draw	rikma/drawing
Man/found	manma/founder
Nai/to see	naima/sight
Derivation of verbs with –ri,-rwu,-su	
Mung	Khwlai
Mwchang	Muchung-ri/
Motom (fragrance)	Motom-rwu /fragrance
Usta (kick)	Usta-ri / kick
Yagul(labour exchange)	Yagul-su /labour exchange
Derivation of Adverb with –hai	
Goron	khwlai Goron
Kobor (crazy)	kobor-hai/crazily
Naithok (beautiful)	Naithok-hai /beautifully
Bigra(poor)	Bigra-hai /poorly

2.2.2.2 Inflectional Morpheme:

Inflectional morphemes do not change the fundamental meaning of words or create new words. Instead, they provide grammatical information such as tense, number, and case.

For example, in Kokborok, the suffix “–kha” in “cha-kha” (eating) indicates tense.

Similarly, “rok” in “swi-rok” (dog’s) functions as a marker of number, though it can be used for both singular and plural forms.

Additionally, “o” in “twi-o” (in the water) denotes case.

3. Conclusion:

The Kokborok Language is a sub-branch of the Tibeto-Burman language. The hill state of Tripura is located in the north-eastern part of India. Where the native language of the tribes is Kokborok. The

Kokborok language has linguistic rules like other languages. These rules are studied in four main branches of linguistics: phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics. Among these morphology studies how words are formed using morphemes. Morphemes are the basic building blocks of words in the Kokborok language. They carry meaning and grammatical information that help create words and sentences. The main types of morphemes in Kokborok include free morphemes, bound morphemes, derivational morphemes and inflectional morphemes. Understanding these morphemes is important for studying the linguistic structure of Kokborok and for learning the language more effectively.

Upon examining the morphemes in Kokborok, it is evident that the language contains both free and bound morphemes. While Kokborok features a substantial number of free morphemes, bound morphemes are relatively rare. All nouns in the language function as free morphemes. The elements “-ya,” “-rok,” and “-song” serve as examples of bound morphemes, as they do not convey meaning independently. Specifically, “-ya” operates as a negative marker (e.g., “thang-ya,” meaning “will not go”). The morpheme “-rok” may indicate either singularity or plurality, depending on context, whereas “-song” is exclusively used as a plural marker with human relational terms.

After examining the use of morphemes in Kokborok, it appears that both free and bound morphemes are present in the language. While Kokborok contains numerous free morphemes, the number of bound morphemes is minimal. All nouns function as free morphemes. The elements “ya,” “rok,” and “song” do not possess intrinsic meaning when used independently. These, represented as “-ya,” “-rok,” and “-song,” serve as examples of bound morphemes, as they lack standalone meaning. However, in Kokborok, “ya” functions as a negative marker (for example, in “thang-ya,” meaning “will not go”). The morpheme “rok” can indicate either singular or plural, depending on context, while “song” is used exclusively as a plural marker for terms relating to human relationships.

A word can shift from a verb to a noun or from an adjective to an adverb through morphological changes. For example: "Sur" (compare/verb/khwlai), "Sur-nai" (comparison/noun/mung), and "Sur-jak" (comparable/adjective/goron). These terms illustrate the use of suffix derivational morphemes. In the Kokborok language, prefix derivational morphemes are less common than suffix derivational morphemes. A morpheme is defined as the smallest unit of meaning within a language. The following section demonstrates how words are constructed from these fundamental units.

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