

NUMERALS IN RONGMEI

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ABSTRACT

Numerals form a special sub-class of nouns. The basic roots of numerals are monomorphemic. The other numerals are derived from compounding these basic numerals. Numeral is a writing technique for stating numbers of a given set, using digits or other symbols in a consistent method. The numeral system is an integral part of Rongmei language. They are also a sort of technical tools used in daily life. In this paper, I shall briefly describe the Rongmei numerals, its kinds and formation in the light of synchronic approaches.

KEYWORDS: Brahmaputra Valley, Barak Valley Numerals, Rongmei

INTRODUCTION

In India, the state of Assam is comprised of three physical divisions, namely, i) The Brahmaputra Valley, ii) The Barak Valley and iii) the Hill range. The Brahmaputra Valley situated in the Northern part of Assam region covering bigger portion of the total area. This Valley is known for its evergreen Rain Forests and one of the most productive areas of the Indian subcontinent. This Valley is stands on the alluvial plain of the mighty river Brahmaputra. The Barak Valley is situated in the southern part of the Indian state of Assam. The place is named after the Barak River. The forests of Barak valley were once prosperous in wildlife but now disappearing due to human assault The Barak Valley consist of three districts of Assam, namely, Cachar, Karimganj and Hailakandi. The Hill range formed the Karbi-Anglong and North-Cachar Hills stand separated the two valleys from the middle. Cachar is the homeland of different ethnic tribes and races, and one such tribe is Rongmei. There are more than 10 different tribal languages spoken in Cachar but most of them are endangered¹ and identified with minority communities. One such community with its own colorful language is Rongmei Naga². The Rongmei is one of the oldest major tribes of Nagas inhabitant in the North Eastern Region of India from time immemorial. It is also considered as a sub tribe of Zeliangrong, which consists of three Naga groups namely Zeme, Liangmei, and Rongmei and is mainly concentrated in the three states of North Eastern India viz., Assam, Manipur, and Nagaland. The alternative spelling of Rongmei is Ruangmei.

According to Grierson (1903), Rongmei in the name of Kabui falls under the Naga sub-section of the Naga-Bodo section under the Assam Burmese group of the Tibeto-Burman branch of Sino-Tibetan or Tibeto-Chinese speech family. Rongmei has a complete numeral system, no parts of it showing any sign of having been borrowed, except the words for 'lakh' and crore.

Review of Literature

The Rongmei language is still in infant stage in terms of its available written literature. No systematic or scientific based study has been done by any linguist or scholar as far as its numeral structures are concerned.

It should be mentioned here that G.A Grierson (1903) described the grammatical sketch of Kabui (Rongmei) in his *Linguistic Survey of India, Vol. III, pt.II*. Further, Grierson points out very briefly about Rongmei numerals. However, his works did not give a detailed study of the structure of numeral in the systematic way. G. Macuga (1999). *The English*

Translation into Ronglat and Miteilon. Publisher: Mr. and Mrs Macuga Ragailong, Burma Camp, Dimapur, Nagaland. Some of the Rongmei vocabularies provided by Macuga are given below:

English	Rongmei
One (1)	Khat
Two (2)	Kanei
Three (3)	Kathum
Four (4)	Padei
Five (5)	Pangu
Ten (10)	Ru
Hundred (100)	Phai
Thousand (1000)	Cing

Neither of these above mentioned work does not clearly emphasize on the structure of numerals. Moreover no work has ever done by any scholar till data. Therefore more study on this subject matter is highly required to find out the existing numeral structures in Rongmei Naga language.

Aim of the Study

The linguistic work done on Rongmei is too scanty and taxonomic. The Rongmei language in Assam is highly influenced by dominant language like Bengali. As a result, the speaker of the same language disuse the lexical items not only relating to indigenous flora and fauna, games, food habits, cultural artifacts etc., but also its original linguistic features. Besides, numeral borrowings are also noticed. As it is known, there are different kinds of numerals like cardinal, fractional, multiplicative etc. All these kinds of numerals very well exist in Rongmei language but due to the surrounding influence of Bengali language they started to use many Bengali numerals in their own vocabulary and made them as the part of their native words. This may lead their entire numeral system to extinction. So, the description, documentation and codification of the numerals are highly required for the preservation and revitalization³ of the numeral system. Hence, the proposed work is an attempt to describe the numeral structures of Rongmei language spoken in Barak Valley Assam, India.

Data and Methodology

The data of the proposed study are collected both directly and indirectly. A comprehensive list of words and sentences in Bengali and English (including the basic numerals like Cardinal Numerals, Ordinal Numerals, Fractional numerals, Multiplicative numerals, Distributive numerals, Restrictive numerals etc.) is made and Rongmei equivalents are elicited from the native speakers. The primary data was collected in the form of conversation, questionnaire and direct observation. People from different age groups, sexes and profession were interviewed. The same data has been cross checked with other speakers of the same variety.

Limitation of the Study

In Assam Rongmeis are mainly concentrated in Barak Valley and in North Catcher Hill (Dima Hasao). My study is a small attempt and limited to Cachar and Hailakandi District (Barak Valley) of Assam. Rongmei spoken in Manipur and Nagaland are phonologically and morphologically to some extent are different from Rongmei spoken in Assam. It is

noticed that Rongmei numerals used in Assam show very close resemblance to Manipur and Nagaland Rongmei respectively.

WHAT IS A NUMBER SYSTEM?

The number system is generally enunciated as a figure, a word or a group of figures used to express a thing by virtue of count or computation. The number system in other way can also be defined as an arrangement of representing numbers or expressing in terms of decimal system or the binary system. It is basically an integral part of a particular language and as with the other quantifiers. The numerals are also found as modifiers of nouns and noun phrases and as free-standing elements. It is generally described in all other parts of the lexicons from the point of view of its syntactic construction and its internal morphology. Like other languages of the world the most common number is a natural number like one, two three... and so on. Rongmei does not have zero cardinal of their own, to fulfill their daily communication they have borrowed from English language.

ON TIBETO-BURMAN (TB) NUMERALS

Many of the Tibeto-Burman languages in North East India are on the verge of endangerment. Most of them are critically endangered due their small number of speakers and low economic status where as some language entities still continuing to struggle actively to solidify their own dialects. The number system is generally taught in a more instructed and orderly manner than that of other educational aspects. Every Tribal language has its own numeral system; but due to the influence of other major neighboring languages many of the TB languages are losing their numerals very slowly and gradually. In most cases native numerals are replaced by the English or neighboring dominant languages and this may be one of the major reasons that the TB numerals are being endangered today. The Thai numbers, for instance, once thought to be derived from the same ancestral forms as the Chinese numbers, and so used to argue for the genetic relationship of these two large language groups, have been shown to have been borrowed from Chinese into Thai at an early date (Benedict, 1942).

Another commonly uttered language under TB languages group is Darma. Darma is an undescribed, unexplored Tibeto-Burman Language which is an inhabitant of Eastern part of Uttarkhand having less than 3000 speakers. But due to the influence of neighboring Hindi language they have all most lost their own numerals.

Likewise the language Rongmei, too have its native numerals but the young children prefer to use English and sometime Bengali since no work so far taken by any linguist to describe their existing numerals like cardinal, ordinal, fractional etc.

RONGMEI NUMERALS

Numeral system in Rongmei is mainly of the decimal type. Vigesimal system is also prevalent in the language. Majority of the numeral roots in the language are mono-morphemic. Bi-morphemic numerals in the language are numeral root plus prefixes for instance; *a-khat* 'one', *ča-ruk* 'six' etc. compounding is the productive morphological process to form the higher numerals. Numerals in Rongmei can be studied in the following classification:

- Cardinal Numerals
- Ordinal Numerals
- Fractional Numerals
- Multiplicative Numerals

- Approximate Numerals
- Distributive Numerals
- Restrictive Numerals

Cardinal Numerals

According to David Crystal, Cardinal is a traditional term retained in some models of grammatical description, referring to the numerals one, two, etc., in contrast with the ordinal numbers first, second etc. The numerals denoting the numbers from one to ten are considered as the basic forms. Typologically cardinal numerals are of three types i) basic cardinal numerals ii) vigesimal cardinal numeral and iii) compound cardinal numerals.

Basic Cardinal Numerals

The basic cardinal numerals are given below:

Value	Gloss	Numerals	Value	Gloss	Numerals
1	'one'	ə.k ^h at	6	'six'	ča.ruk
2	'two'	kə.nai	7	'seven'	ča.nai
3	'three'	kə.t ^h um/təm	8	'eight'	tə.čat
4	'four'	pə.dai	9	'nine'	ča.kiu
5	'five'	paŋ.u	10	'ten'	ru/rek

Vegesimal Cardinal Numeral

The numeral 20/twenty is a vegesimal ones.

Value	Gloss	Numerals
20	'twenty'	čui

Compound Cardinal Numerals

The compound cardinal numerals in Rongmei Naga can be classified into three types. They are given below:

- Addition compound numerals
- Multiplication compound numerals
- Multiplication cum addition compound numerals

Addition Compound Numerals

The numerals from eleven to nineteen are addition compound numerals. They are formed by the addition of decade *ru* 'ten' with the basic numerals. The additive cardinal numerals are given below:

ru k ^h at	'eleven'
10 + 1 = 11	
ru kənai	'twelve'
10 + 2 = 12	
ruk kət ^h um	'thirteen'
10 + 3 = 13	
ru pə dai	'fourteen'

$$10 + 4 = 14$$

ruk paŋu 'fifteen'

$$10 + 5 = 15$$

ru čaruk 'sixteen'

$$10 + 6 = 16$$

ru čanai 'seventeen'

$$10 + 7 = 17$$

ru təčat 'eighteen'

$$10 + 8 = 18$$

ru čakui 'nineteen'

$$10 + 9 = 19$$

Multiplication Compound Numerals

The multiplicative compound numeral 30/thirty is formed through the multiplication of basic numeral 3/three to decade **ru** 'ten'

Value	Gloss	Numeral
30	'thirty'	təm- ru

The decade numerals from 40, 50, 60, 70, 80, and 90 are formed by multiplication of decade root **rek** 'ten' by basic numerals from 4/four to 9/nine respectively.

Value	Gloss	Numerals
40	'forty'	rek- pəđai
50	'fifty'	rek-paŋu
60	'sixty'	rek- čaruk
70	'seventy'	rek- čanai
80	'eighty'	rek- təčat
90	'ninety'	rek- čakui

The century numerals from one hundred to nine hundred are formed by multiplication of the century root **p^hai-** 'hundred' from one to nine. As in the following table:

Value	Gloss	Numerals
101	'one hundred'	p ^h ai-k ^h at
102	'two hundred'	p ^h ai- kənai
103	'three hundred'	p ^h ai- kət ^h um
104	'four hundred'	p ^h ai - pəđai
105	'five hundred'	p ^h ai- paŋu
106	'six hundred'	p ^h ai -čaruk
107	'seven hundred'	p ^h ai -čanai
108	'eight hundred'	p ^h ai -təčat
109	'nine hundred'	p ^h ai -čakui

The numerals from one thousand to nine thousand are formed by multiplication of the root **čiq-** 'thousand' from one to nine. As in the following table:

Value	Gloss	Numerals
101	'one thousand'	čij -k ^h at
102	'two thousand'	čij - kənai
103	'three thousand'	čij - kət ^h um
104	'four thousand'	čij - pə dai
105	'five thousand'	čij - paŋu
106	'six thousand'	čij - čaruk
107	'seven thousand'	čij - čanai
108	'eight thousand'	čij - təčət
109	'nine thousand'	čij - čakiu

Multiplication Cum Addition Compound Numerals

Rongmei numerals from 41-49, 51-59, 61- 69, 70-79,80-89, 90-99 and so on are formed through the multiplication of first two numerals and the summation of the third ones.

rek- pə dai -ək ^h at	'forty one'
[10x4+ 1= 41]	
rek- pə dai - kənai	'forty two'
[10x4+ 2= 42]	
rek- čaruk- kət ^h um	'sixty three'
[10x6+ 3= 63]	
rek- čaruk- pə dai	'sixty four'
[10x6+ 4= 64]	
rek- čanai- paŋ.u	'seventy five'
[10x7+5= 75]	
rek- čanai- čaruk	'seventy six'
[10x7+6= 76]	
rek- təčət - čanai	'eighty seven'
[10x8+7= 87]	
rek- təčət - təčət	'eighty eight'
[10x8+8= 88]	
rek- čakiu- čakiu	'ninety nine'
[10x9+9= 99]	

Ordinal Numerals

Ordinal numerals are those numerals which represent rank with respect of some position or order. The ordinal numerals second, third, fourth, etc. are formed by suffixing -mai to the numerals 2 to 9 respectively.

Value	Gloss	Numerals
2 nd	'second'	kənai-mai
3 rd	'third'	kət ^h um-mai
4 th	'fourth'	pədai-mai
5 th	'fifth'	paŋu-mai
6 th	'sixth'	čaruk-mai
7 th	'seven'	čanai-mai
8 th	'eight'	təčat-mai
9 th	'ninth'	čakiu-mai
10 th	'tenth'	ru-mai

Fractional Numerals

A **fraction** (from Latin: *fractus*, "broken"). In most of the TB languages fraction entails how many parts of definite size are there, for instance half, one and half, two and half etc. Fractional in Rongmei Naga are expressed by locative suffix **-k^hau**.

<i>ək^hat</i>	<i>-k^hau</i>	<i>kadəm</i>	<i>kənai</i>			'1/2'
one	-LOC	divide	two			
<i>ək^hat</i>	<i>le</i>	<i>ək^hat</i>	<i>-k^hau</i>	<i>kadəm</i>	<i>kənai</i>	'1 and 1/2'
one	and	one	-LOC	divide	two	
<i>ək^hat</i>	<i>-k^hau</i>	<i>kadəm</i>	<i>kət^hum</i>			'1/3'
one	-LOC	divide	three			
<i>ək^hat</i>	<i>le</i>	<i>ək^hat</i>	<i>-k^hau</i>	<i>kadəm</i>	<i>kət^hum</i>	'1 and 1/3'
one	and	one	-LOC	divide	three	
<i>kənai</i>	<i>-k^hau</i>	<i>kadəm</i>	<i>čaruk</i>			'2/6'
two	-LOC	divide	six			
<i>ək^hat</i>	<i>-k^hau</i>	<i>kadəm</i>	<i>təčat</i>			'1/8'
one	-LOC	divide	eight			
<i>ru</i>	<i>le</i>	<i>ək^hat</i>	<i>-k^hau</i>	<i>kadəm</i>	<i>kənai</i>	'10 and 1/2'
ten	and	one	-LOC	divid	two	

Multiplicative Numerals

Multiplicative numeral expresses how many times or how many fold. Multiplicative numerals in Rongmei are formed by prefixing **liəŋ**-‘repeat’ to the cardinal numerals.

<i>liəŋ- k^hat</i>	'once'
<i>liəŋ- kənai</i>	'twice'
<i>liəŋ- kət^hum</i>	'thrice'
<i>liəŋ- pədai</i>	'four times'

<i>liaŋ-paŋu</i>	‘five times’
<i>liaŋ-čaruk</i>	‘six times’
<i>liaŋ-čanai</i>	‘seven times’
<i>liaŋ-təčət</i>	‘eight times’
<i>liaŋ-čakiu</i>	‘nine times’
<i>liaŋ-ru</i>	‘ten times’
<i>liaŋ-čui</i>	‘twenty times’

Approximate Numerals

Approximate numerals are those numerals which are close to the actual but not completely exact or authentic. The approximate root is *kələm* ‘about’ which occur before the cardinal numerals.

<i>kələm - k^hat</i>	‘about one’
<i>kələm - kənai</i>	‘about two’
<i>kələm kəl^hum</i>	‘about three’
<i>kələm - pədai</i>	‘about four’
<i>kələm -paŋu</i>	‘about five’
<i>kələm -ru</i>	‘about ten’
<i>kələm -čui</i>	‘about twenty’
<i>kələm-p^hai</i>	‘about hundred’
<i>kələm-čij</i>	‘about thousand’

Distributive Numerals

Distributive numerals expressed a group of the number specified. They are generally related to distribution of numbers. The distributive numerals are formed by the reduplicating the cardinal numerals as exemplified below:

<i>ək^hat-ək^hat</i>	‘one by one’
<i>kənai-kənai</i>	‘two each’
<i>kəl^hum -kəl^hum</i>	‘three each’
<i>pədai-pədai</i>	‘four each’
<i>paŋu-paŋu</i>	‘five each’
<i>čaruk-čaruk</i>	‘six each’
<i>čanai-čanai</i>	‘seven each’
<i>təčət-təčət</i>	‘eight each’
<i>čakiu-čakiu</i>	‘nine each’

<i>ruh-ru</i>	‘ten each’
<i>čui-čui</i>	‘twenty each’

Restrictive Numerals

Restrictive numerals generally impose restriction or limitation on cardinal numerals. Restrictive numerals are formed by adding a suffix **-na** to the cardinal numerals.

<i>ə k^hat-na</i>	‘only one’
<i>kənai-na</i>	‘only two’
<i>kə^hum-na</i>	‘only three’
<i>pədai-na</i>	‘only four’
<i>paŋu-na</i>	‘only five’
<i>ru-na</i>	‘only ten’
<i>čui-na</i>	‘only twenty’
<i>p^hai-na</i>	‘only hundred’
<i>čiŋ-na</i>	‘only thousand’

IMPLICATIONS

- The numerals 1/one to 9/nine are bi-morphemic having different prefixes. Unlike the above numerals, the numeral 10/ten does not take any prefix and it is a mono-morphemic, mono-syllabic in nature.
- No numeral classifiers exist in the language.
- Rongmei has two basic numerals *kə^hum* and *tam* and two decade roots namely, *ru* and *rek*. The decade root *ru* is common in the language and *rek* root is restricted to the formation of some multiplicities like 40/forty, 50/fifty, 60/sixty, 70/seventy, 80/eighty, and 90/ninety.
- In the construction of compound cardinal numerals the associative particle *-nə* is added to the numeral root like *ək^hatna* but in the Barak Valley variety this is not prevalent, only *ək^hat* is used.
- The ordinal numeral first is *reimai*. As in many other TB languages, the ordinal ‘first’ is not formed from one, whereas the rest of the ordinals are formed from the corresponding numerals by means of suffixation.
- The numerals system in Rongmei is mainly of decimal type. The compounding is also very productive in the language.
- Most of the roots are monomorphemic.

CONCLUSIONS

The numerals are the subclass of noun. Numerals are however unlike nouns, in that, their basic function is to modify (quantify) a head noun. The numerals are the basic tools of a language need for daily communication. This paper is an effort to analyze various aspects of Rongmei numeral system. The complex numeral system of Rongmei can even be enriched by investigating the existence of numerals like aggregative, measure words and indefinite quantity etc. There are a

good many dialects in Rongmei with a great deal of variations. Methodological survey is required to account for the difference in numeral systems amongst these dialects and this certainly demands further research. In my next investigation I will try to focus on the numeral systems of other Rongmei varieties.

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END NOTES

1. *Endanger*¹: Cause danger to or extinction.
2. *Naga*²: Some of the non-Naga scholars tried to link the origin of the word Naga to ancient Sanskrit literature. To these scholars, 'Naga' means serpent. R.Vashum (2000:09) opined that the word Naga was derived from the Burmese word *naka* meaning pierced ears as the Nagas had the tradition of making holes in the ears for ear decorations.
3. *Revitalization*³: to give new life, energy, activity or success to something.

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