Meaning in Rongmei

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Abstract

Meaning plays a very significant role in human languages. Meaning is the soul of a language. The importance of meaning has been recognized since the time immemorial. In the Vedas, the meaning is treated as the essence of language, the speech without meaning called 'the tree without fruits and flowers'[1] Ancient Indian pedantic such as Patanjali, Vyadi, Katyayana, Vyas etc observed the association of word and meaning as eternal. Recently Rongmei has been renamed as Ruangmei by the Rongmei Literature Society. However I shall be using Rongmei only, since they are still known as Rongmei in the Government records. The present study is a humble attempt to explore the meaning of Rongmei Naga of Barak Valley[2], Assam. The study also reveals the various kinds of meaning in light of synchronic approaches.

Keywords: Lexical meaning, Sentence meaning, Utterance meaning, Meaning in reduplication, Social meaning

1. Introduction

The meaning of Rongmei is the people from the south means 'Southerner'. Rongmei is one of the Tibeto-Burman languages of South East Asia, mainly spoken in the three states of Northeast India viz., Assam, Manipur, and Nagaland. Ethnically Rongmeis are of Mongoloid origin and probably migrated from the western part of Tibet to North Eastern India. They were considered as the aborigines of Barak Valley[3]. The Rongmei tribe is one of the earliest tribes that had settled in and even today they are an integral part of the Barak Valley Diaspora .The Rongmei Naga of BarakValley can be categorized into two main groups based on their religious belief namely Christian and non-Christian. Societal scenario of this tribe is more or less as par with the other tribal communities of northeastern states of Indian. Semantics is a branch of Linguistics which deals with the study of meaning and its manifestation in a language. Meaning is treated as the core of a language

1.1 Literary Review

As far as earlier works are concerned Rongmei language is in infant stage i.e., the extensive description or documentation of this language has not been done by any linguist so far. The following are the major related works found in this variety that includes: 1) Deb, Debajit. (2012).Bilingualism and Language Maintenance in Barak Valley, Assam -A Case Study on Rongmei. *Language in India*. Volume 12: 1 January ISSN 1930-2940. 2) Deb, Debajit. (2012). On Gender Marking in Rongmei Naga. *Language in India*. Volume 12: 6 June ISSN 1930-2940. 3) G. Makuga. (1994). *Introduction to Rongmei Naga* J.M. Printing Works. Imphal 4) Neihlalung.K.G.,(2008) *Pacgaymeilat*. Published by: Rongmei Literature Committee. Assam. Neither of these above mentioned works clearly did not emphasize on meaning (semantic) nor is any work done by any scholar till data. Therefore more study on this subject matter is highly required to find out the various kinds meaning. Hence the proposed study is essential to analyze the existing meaning types in the said language.
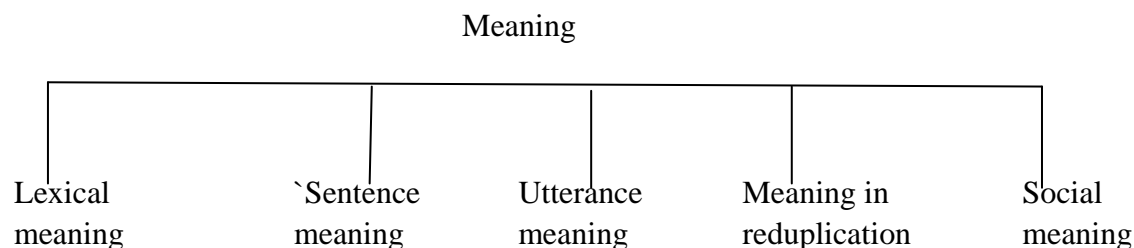
1.2 Methodology

The present paper is based on the data collected from the members of the Rongmei community living in Languangluang (Fulertal), Kaguailuang (Phatokbazzar) Ngaselong (Kalabil) of Cachar District of Assam during 2011, November. People from the different age groups including both the sexes were surveyed for this study. The questionnaire elicited data on various kinds of meaning, its function, its usage in the different domains and so on were asked through interview method.

2. Meaning in Rongmei

Meaning is the soul of a language. Most of the words are monosyllabic in nature. Each word in the language has its own meaning. In linguistics, it is the study of interpretation of signs or symbols as used by agents or communities within particular circumstances and contexts. The formal study of meaning intersects with many other fields of inquiry, including lexicology, syntax, pragmatics, etymology and others, although meaning is a well-defined field in its own right, often with synthetic properties. It is observed that most of the nouns have single meaning. Words with more then one meaning do also exist very frequently in this language.

Most of the verbs are carrying more then the one meaning in accordance with context. So context is the core idea to interpret the meaning. In the present language there exist more than 10 (ten) kinds of meaning, (like denotative, connotative, thematic, emotive, collocative meaning etc.) but my study will confine to the following (five) 5 types of meaning which are uncommon and not explored so far.

Meaning

| Lexical meaning | `Sentence meaning | Utterance meaning | Meaning in reduplication | Social meaning |

2.1 Lexical Meaning in Collocation

The meaning of a word in relation to the physical world or to abstract concepts, without reference to any sentence in which the word may occur. It is the relationship of reference and denotation of lexeme. The lexical meaning is changeable according to the context. In other hand different lexical items may carry or convey same or nearly same meaning in collocation with other lexemes. For example:

2.1.1 Lexical items relating to the sense of washing

i.	*ʐau p^{h}i*	'to wash face'
ii.	*dui lau*	'to take bath'
iii.	*ban k^{h}u*	'to wash hand'
iv.	*p^{h}ai sau*	'to rinse cloth'
v.	*čam*	'to wash edible items'

2.1.2 Lexical item relating to sense of making

i.	*kai su*	'to make house'
ii.	*dam*	'to create story'
iii.	*duan*	'to decorate'
iv.	*nəp ban*	'to make rice'
v.	*gən suaŋ*	'to make curry'

2.1.3 Lexical item relating to sense of eating

i.	*tu*	'to eat'
ii.	*p^{h}ən*	'to eat grains'
iii.	*dui ʐaŋ*	'to drink water'
iv.	*kadik*	'to drink non-stop'
iv.	*luak*	'to devour'

2.1.4 Lexical items relating to sense of wearing

i.	*t^{h}ula pu*	'put on shirt or t-shirt'

ii.	*ban*	'to put on shawl'
iii.	*tʰiat*	'to put a flower on the hair'
iv.	*ta run*	' put on bangles'
v.	*kam*	'to put a belt'

2.1.5 Lexical items relating to sense of opening

i.	*mik rak*	'to open eyes'
ii.	*lan*	'to open door'
iii.	*muaŋ kʰa*	'to open mouth'
iv.	*larik phek*	'to open book'
v.	*luak*	'to open shirt'

2.1.6 Lexical relating to the sense of speaking

i.	*lu suan*	'to sing'
ii.	*sa*	'to speak'
iii.	*dau*	'to express'
iv.	*pari rə*	'to tell a story'
v.	*suai*	'to utter mantra in puja'

2.1.7 Lexical items related to sense of seeing

i.	*hau*	'to see anything'
ii.	*zau*	'to watch TV, or movie or theater'
iii.	*pʰeŋ*	'to watch something located in far'
iv.	*tin*	'to watch something hiddenly'

2.1.8 Lexical item relating to sense of driving

i.	*tʰau*	'to drive a car'
ii.	*čau*	'to rowing a boat'

3. Sentence Meaning

Sentence meaning is the combination of the lexical and grammatical meaning. In addition to this construction tone may also affect sentence meaning. For example if we say /ai cophi suni mak e/'I do not like coffee', means I do not like coffee, but may like some other drinks; /ai cophi suni mak e/ 'I do not like coffee' means that I do not like coffee but some else does. Speaker can use tone to change meaning of the sentence. Syntax and Semantics are closely interdependent to each other in sentence meaning.

Further sentence may be used by the speaker to perform as the act of questioning, warning, threatening, promising etc. thus a sentence such as /khaŋŋai ču e/'Its cold in here' could be used as an order or request to someone to shut the window, even though it is declarative sentence. Similarly an interrogative sentence such as /naŋ kaikhəm baŋ ŋəm dai/ 'could you shut the door?' can be used to perform the act of requesting or commanding rather then that of questioning. Since Syntax and Semantics move hand in hand following diagram shows the

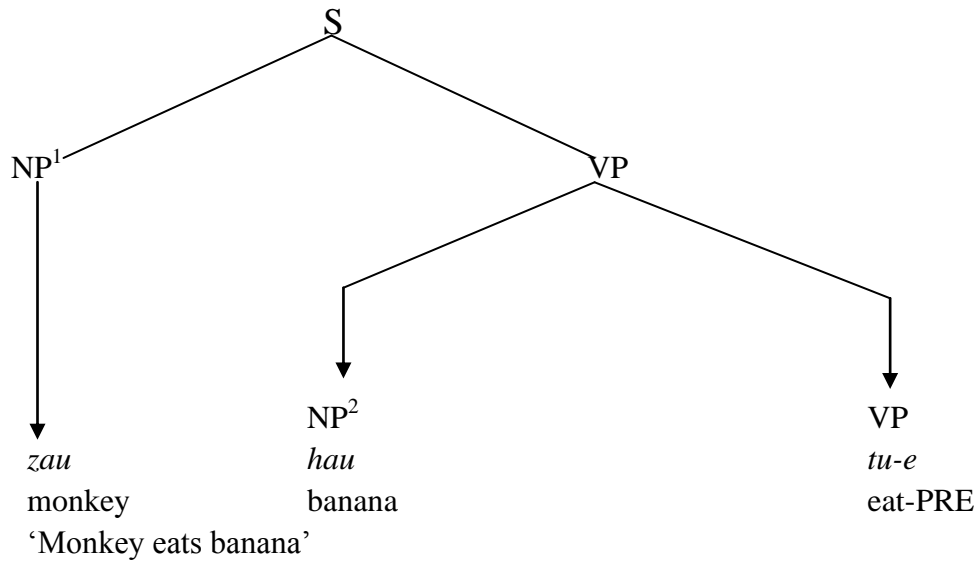core relationship between Syntax and Semantics structure.
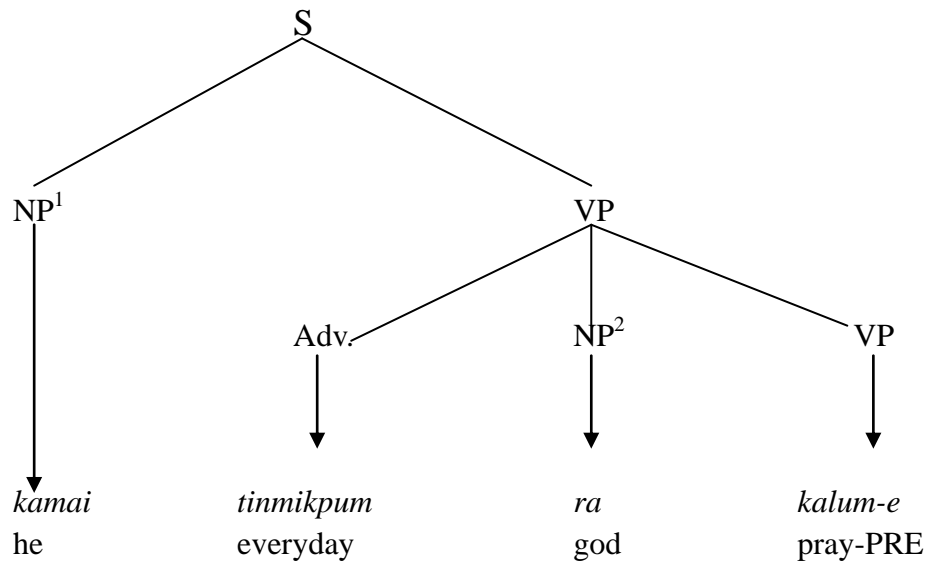

Figure 1. (Tree Diagram)

Figure 2. (Tree Diagram)

'He prays God everyday'

Thus the semantics construction of a sentence depends on the syntactic construction of SOV order in Rongmei Naga. Same order is also followed in other TB languages.

3.1 Sometime Syntactically Well Formed Sentence May not be semantically Correct

For example in Rongmei:

> * *sian t^{h}aukummai-ta čak^{h}uaŋ -mak -e*
>   money everbody-ACC respect -NEG-PRE
> *'Money does not respect anybody'

Thus the above sentence is semantically ill formed because the subject money is not human being so it can not respect anybody but syntactically well-formed. Some more illustrations in Rongmei are:

> **guaici naudui ti-e*
>   bull   milk give-PRE
>   '*Bull gives milk'

The above mention sentence is semantically ill formed because their meaning is sarcastically expressed but they are syntactically well formed. If the negator *-mak* is suffixed to the verb root then the sentence will become semantically and syntactically well formed. As in

> *guaiči naudui ti-mak-e*
>   bull   milk   give-NEG-PRE
>   'Bull does not give milk'

4. Utterance Meaning

This is the meaning that a sentence has when a speaker utters it to perform some act, in particular appropriate circumstances. Utterance meaning means when we respond to the speaker's act or this is the meaning that a sentence has when a speaker utters it to perform some act, in particular appropriate circumstances. In the utterance meaning tone or tone shift plays a significant role. It may vary from the lexical meaning. Most common types are *Sarcasm* and *Question*[3]

4.1 Scarcasm

The use of remarks which clearly mean the opposite of what they say and which are made in order to hurt to someone's feeling or to criticize something in an amusing way

> *naŋ painə gaimai maru-e a-tuaŋ riənrəmai k^{h}au gan naŋ a-ta aria na zau-e*
>   you verygood friend-PRE i-GEN trouble   in time you i-ACC forsake show-PRE
>   'A very fine friend you are to forsake me in my trouble'

> *kamai paina nuai –e*
>   she   very fat -PRE
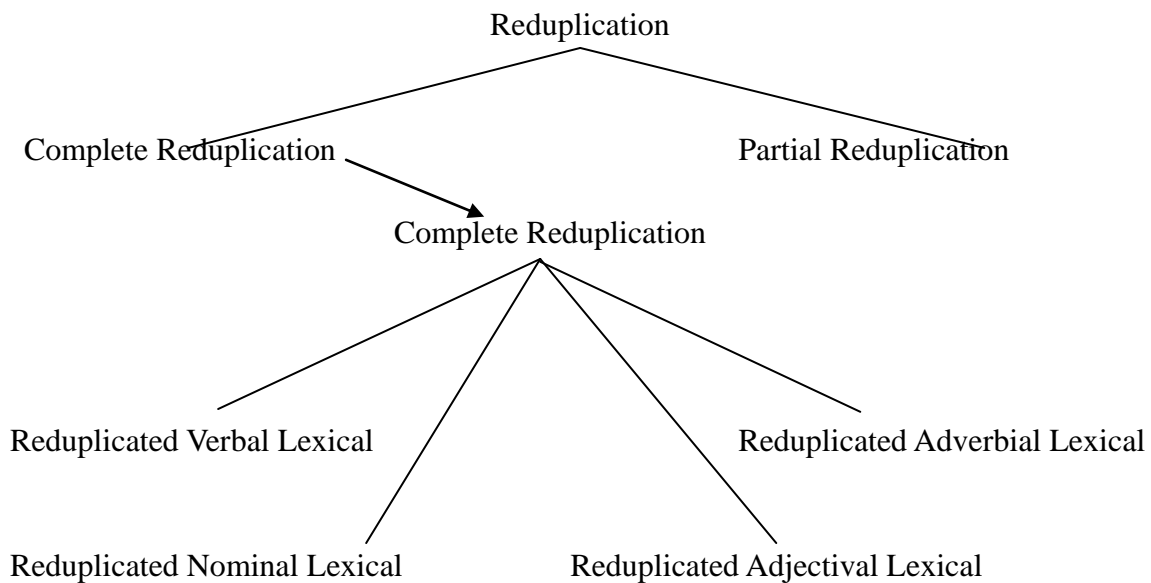>   'She is very fat' (to express to thin)

4.2 Question

Question utterance is another kind of utterance meaning. It is generally formed when a positive sentence by changing the pitch of a tone can be well expressed a question. Examples are illustrated bellow:

naŋ ti -tʰe
you give-PST
'You gave' (have you given?)

naŋ tat -tʰe
you go-PST
'You went' (have you gone?)

5. Meaning in Reduplication

Reduplication is very productive phenomena in TB languages. It is one of the word formation processes in most of the Sino-Tibetan language in which the repetition of all or a part of a lexical item carrying a semantic modification. Reduplication can either be complete or partial. Reduplication is used in the language to express a grammatical function such as intensification; plurality etc. and meaningful words are formed by the lexical derivation. Reduplication is very common and found in the wide rage of language and language groups in the world, but its circumstance of usage varies. Reduplicated lexical items give the emphasis meaning to a sense of a sentence. Reduplication can be semantically analysis in Rongmei into the following heads:

Reduplication

Complete Reduplication   Partial Reduplication

Complete Reduplication

Reduplicated Verbal Lexical   Reduplicated Adverbial Lexical

Reduplicated Nominal Lexical   Reduplicated Adjectival Lexical

5.1 Reduplicated Verbal Lexical Item

It is the action or activity which is carried out by someone. It emphasis or entails the meaning of certainty or definite in assertive sentence. The examples are given below:

> *kaniu kʰau guaŋ -tʰe guaŋ -tʰe*
> they here come-PST come-PST
> 'They have come here, certainly'

ai ka -ta hau -t^{h}e hau -t^{h}e
I him-Acc see-PST see-PST
'I saw him, certainly'

5.2 Reduplicated Nominal Lexical Item

Here two nominal items are repeated to emphasis the meaning of plurality in the language. Example in Range is:

kaniu kai kai -t^{h}aŋ han tat -kan -t^{h}e
they house house-LOC return go -PRF –PST
'They have return to their respective houses'

In a common circumstances when a noun object is seen which is very hazardous or aggressive, create fear in human mind than the word is uttered repeatedly in a high pitch because it may hurt some one. This kind of utterance alerts the listener to be aware or take care of them

kamaŋ kamanŋ
tiger tiger
'There is a tiger' (beware of it)

si si
dog dog
'There is a dog' (beware of it)

5.3 Reduplicated Adjectival Lexical Item

In this kind of construction, the adjectival reduplicated elements are not similar as whole that is one element has nominal suffix /-mai/ and other have none. However the roots and their meanings remain same. Thus it pluralizes by emphasizing the quality and quantity of noun. The reduplicated adjective show the pluralizing meaning without the plural marker /-guai/.

dai dai-mai bəpt^{h}ai
big big-NOM SUF mango
'Big big mangoes'

t^{h}iəm t^{h}iəm-mai k^{h}a
small small-NOM SUF fish
'Small small fishes'

5.4 Reduplicated Adverbial Lexical Item

Reduplicated adverbial lexical item changes or qualifies the meaning of a verb, or other adverb. An adverb indicates manner, time, place, cause, or degree etc. It can be further categorized in Rongmei into four following items:

Reduplicated Adverbial Lexical item

Reduplicated Adverb of Manner   Reduplicated Adverb of Frequency

Reduplicated Adverb Time   Reduplicated Adverb of Degree
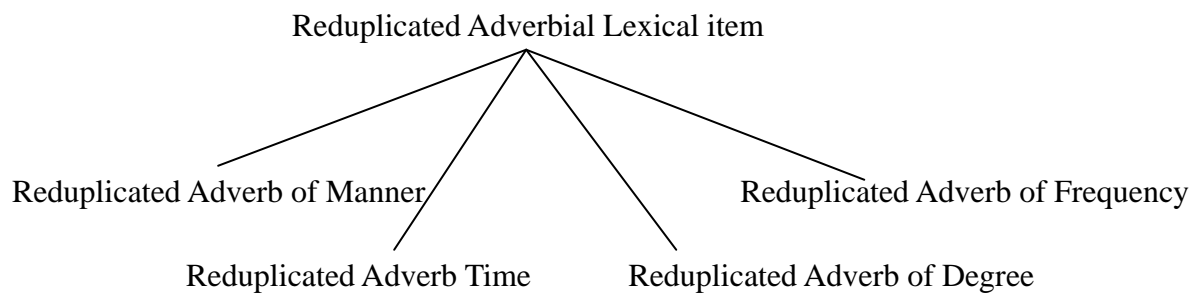
5.4.1 Reduplicated Adverb of Manner

> *katumna katumna tat -o*
> quickly quickly go-IMP
> 'Go quickly'

> *kauna kauna suan -o*
> loudly loudly sing-IMP
> 'Sing loudly'

5.4.2 Reduplicated Adverb of Frequency

> *kamai kʰau kuŋna kuŋna guaŋ -e*
> he here less less come-PRE
> 'He comes here hardly

> *kamai america tat tan tan -e*
> he America go frequent frequent-PRE
> 'He goes to America frequently'

5.4.3 Reduplicated Adverb Time

> *tau tau ti-o*
> now now give-IMP
> 'Give it right now'

> *kagən kagən guaŋ -o*
> time time come-IMP
> 'Come timely'

5.4.4 Reduplicated Adverb of Degree

> *painə painə ruai*
> many many bird
> 'Many birds'

> *painə painə nəp ti-o*

more more rice give-IMP

'Give more rice'

5.5 Partial Reduplication

Partial reduplication involves reduplication of only part of a word. Partial reduplication includes consonant ablaut or vowel alternation (e.g. / i-æ/ as in rip rap and /i-o/ as in ping pong). There are three types of partial reduplications namely i) vowel alternations (si-sa 'dog etc'), ii) rhyming words (zik-za 'dew etc') and iii) onset alternations. In onset alternation two different free words are uttered. Following example shows the onset alternation:

mi tat-pat tat-gut -mai ceŋ -e

this go-out go-in -NOM SUF road-PRE

'It is a means of communication'

6. Social Meaning

The meaning conveyed by the piece of language about the social context of its use is called the social meaning. The society itself is bound to these meanings. Denotative meaning is differing from the social meaning. Social meaning is related to the situation in which an utterance is restricted in some social contexts For instance some noun words have restricted social meaning instead of its denotative meaning. It is concerned with the social circumstances of the use of a linguistic expression. For example, some taboo words inform us about the social restriction of the Rongmei speakers in some situation. Consider the following examples:

Word	Gloss		Social meaning	Gloss
miaunadaimai	(jangle)	'big cat'	*kamaŋ*	'tiger'
ruaidapuimikdui	(night)	'peacock tear'	*zauzaŋmai*	'drinker'
kabuŋtuikui	(night)	'crawling reptile'	*inruai*	'snake'

Those types of lexical items are very commonly used in the Rongmei society. The lexical item miaunadaimai 'big cat' is a substitute lexical item to utter for *kamang* 'tiger' in the jangle. They used this word when they visit in the jangle for hunting of birds and other animals. They believe that if they utter unswervingly the name of tiger, it may come and may attack them. Another lexical item is *ruaidapuimikdui* is used when they refer to a drinker. They feel that drinker may get angry if he is directly called a drinker. As a result they substitute the word for peacock tear in the night. Similarly, *kabuŋtui* 'crawling reptile' is a substitute word for *inruai* 'snake'. They use the lexical item kabuŋtui in the night thinking that if they used *inruai,* the snake may come and may bite them.

Let us summarized the five types of meanings in the following table:

Five types of meaning		**Example**
1. LEXICAL MEANING	It is the relationship of reference and denotation of lexeme. The lexical meaning is changeable according to the context	Sense of washing: *zau p^{h}i* 'to wash face' *ban k^{h}u* 'to wash hand'
2. SENTENCE MEANING	Sentence meaning is the combination of lexical and grammatical meaning.	*zau hau tu e* 'monkey eats banana'
3. UTTERANCE MEANING	Utterance meaning means when we respond to the speaker's act.	Sarcasm: *kamai paina nuai e* 'she is very fat' (to express to thin)
4. MEANING IN REDUPL--ICATION	The repetition of all or a part of a lexical item carrying a semantic modification.	Plurality: *dai dai-mai bəpt^{h}ai* 'big big mangoes'
5. SOCIAL MEANING	Social meaning is related to the situation in which an utterance is used	*miaunadaimai*(jangle)'big cat'. *kamaŋ* 'tiger

7. Conclusion

This paper was an effort to analyze the various aspects of Rongmei meanings. I can conclude that all the above meanings are important and have a very significant role in the language. There are a good many dialects in Rongmei with a great deal of variations. Methodological survey is required to account for the difference in meaning system amongst these dialects. This demands further research. In this paper I have tried to explain the five meanings in Rongmei Naga. The structure of meaning system of Rongmei can even be enriched by investigating the existing meanings like connotative, denotative etc. My further research will focus on this issue.

Acknowledgement

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Notes

Following are explanation of the superscripts discussed in the above mentioned paper:

Note 1. (Rig-Veda 9/71/5)

cf. (Yaska, Nirukta 1/20)

Note 2. This valley includes three districts of Assam, India namely, Cachar, Karimganj and Hailakandi

Note 3. These two types of utterance meaning are discussed by D.Hidam in his book.

Abbreviation

*	-	Ungrammatical sentence
ACC	-	Accusative
GEN	-	Genitive
FUT	-	Future
IMP	-	Imperative marker
LOC	-	Locative
NOM SUF	-	Nominal Suffix
NEG	-	Negative
PST	-	Past
PRE	-	Present tense marker
PRF	-	Perfective