



RESEARCH ARTICLE



PRONOUNS IN SUNWAR

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ABSTRACT



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Sunwar (ISO 639-3 suz) belongs to the Sino-Tibetan language of Tibeto-Burman language family of Kiranti branch of Himalayan group. The present paper will concentrate on pronouns in Sunwar. Sunwars are the smallest and lesser known ethnic community of Sikkim. The pronouns are one of the basic features of a language. Pronouns are frequently used in conversations but it is less explored than any other linguistic feature of a language. Sunwar possesses a great wealth of varieties of pronouns which includes personal pronouns, demonstrative pronouns, interrogative pronouns, relative pronouns, reflexive pronouns, indefinite pronouns. The data has been collected from the state of Sikkim mainly from the east, west and south region and cross checked by the native speakers of the language from different age groups (40 to 70). Apart from the primary data some secondary sources are also used to gather information. The speakers of the Sunwar language have switched to speaking Nepali, which is the official language of Sikkim State, putting the language at the risk of extinction. This paper is a small effort to document the language for the recent and future generation of the language speakers and researchers.

Keywords: *Sunwar, Pronouns, Types, Features.*



1. INTRODUCTION

Sunwar is a language of the Tibeto-Burman language family of Sino-Tibetan languages. It is categorized as a language of Kiranti Branch of Himalayan group under Tibeto-Burman languages. Grierson in his '*Linguistic Survey of India Vol- III (1909)*' categorized Sunwar as a non-pronominalized sub-group of Himalayan languages of Tibeto-Burman family. Sunwars are sporadically dispersed throughout Sikkim state. They are mostly found in east, west and southern regions and also can be found in the neighboring hill areas of Darjeeling in West-Bengal. UNESCO has mentioned the community as well as the language as '*Sunwar*' or '*Sunuwar*' but the natives call themselves as '*Koinch*' or '*Koinch-bu*' or '*kirantibansi*' (Sunuwar community). However, the Sikkim state government has recognized the community as '*Mukhia*' (chief). Sunwar is one of the tiny and least well-known tribes of Sikkim state. Sunwars are surrounded by Nepali speakers from the very beginning and so they are well versed in Nepali language also. And because of the Nepali being the official or the lingua franca of Sikkim state the utility of their native tongue is extremely limited. Majority of the Sunwar people speak Nepali as their primary means of communication however very few people can speak Sunwar language. There is no intergenerational transmission of the language because only a few adults can speak their native tongue in Sikkim State.

The total number of Sunwar speakers reported in Sikkim, according to Grierson's '*Linguistic Survey of Sikkim Vol-III (1909)*', was only 545. There were 644 speakers documented in the census of 1951, and 297 speakers were recorded in the census of 1961. The speaker strength of Sunwar is listed

under the 'Others' category due to the prohibition of publishing population lists from the 1971 census with a population below ten thousand(10,000). Due to the limited number of speakers in daily discourse, the Sunwar language is in danger of falling out of use. The Sunwar language is on the verge of extinction. During the fieldwork it was observed that the number of fluent speakers of Sunwar is less than 7 and most of them are elderly people who can communicate in Sunwar language.

1.1 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objective of the present paper is to bring out the pronominal system in Sunwar language. The present study intends to give a complete view of the pronominal system and different types of pronouns available in the language.

1.2 METHODOLOGY

The data for the present study was collected mainly from east, west and south parts of Sikkim in several field investigations. The methods applied for collecting data for the present study includes both primary and secondary sources. The primary source is based on personal contact with the speech community through informants of different age groups, professionals and sexes with the help of questionnaires. The secondary method for collecting data includes available written materials like referred journals, articles and books etc.

2. TYPOLOGICAL FEATURES OF SUNWAR

Typologically, like many of the Tibeto-Burman languages, Sunwar is a tonal and agglutinating language. Nouns in Sunwar can be marked for



number, gender and case. Tense in Sunwar shows two way contrasts in terms of tense i.e. either 'past' or 'non-past' like many. There is no grammatical gender in Sunwar. Gender distinction of Sunwar is made on the basis of natural sexes as masculine and feminine. There is also a third type of gender found in Sunwar called neuter gender and all the inanimate are categorized as this type of gender. Sunwar is seen to have a numeral system that is of decimal type and it lacks a vigesimal numeral system. Verbs are not marked for persons, numbers and gender in Sunwar. Sunwar also follows SOV (Subject + Object + Verb) word order. There is only one negative marker (prefix) available in the language i.e. *mā-*.

3. PRONOUNS IN SUNWAR

An Overview

The pronouns are one of the most basic features of any language. Pronouns are the words which replace the noun in a sentence. Pronouns in Sunwar can take case markers as well as number markers but it lacks to show gender distinction. Pronouns can be used on

the criterion of person and number whereas nouns can always be used in the third person. Pronouns in Sunwar can be classified into

- (i) Personal pronouns,
- (ii) Demonstrative pronouns,
- (iii) Interrogative pronouns,
- (iv) Reflexive pronouns,
- (v) Indefinite pronouns,

3.1 PERSONAL PRONOUNS

Personal Pronouns in Sunwar can be distinguished in three ways in terms of person i.e. (i) first person, (ii) second person and (iii) third person and it can also be distinguished in two ways in terms of number i.e. singular and plural. Structurally all the singular personal pronouns are monosyllabic except *mékò* 'he/she' (third person singular personal pronoun) which is disyllabic. However, the plural forms of all the personal pronouns are constructed by suffixing the plural marker *-puki* i.e. *go-puki* (we), *gé~goi-puki* (you, Plural), *mékò~mé?-puki* (they). Personal pronouns of Sunwar are shown in the following table no.

Person	Singular	Plural
1 st Person	go 'I'	go-puki 'we'
2 nd Person	goi~gé 'you'	goi-puki~gé-puki 'you'
3 rd Person	mékò~mé? 'he/she'	mékò-puki~mé?-puki 'they'

Table 1: Personal pronouns in Sunwar



3.2 DEMONSTRATIVE PRONOUNS

Demonstrative pronouns in Sunwar can be defined on the basis of distance i.e. proximity or remoteness. It is found that the demonstrative pronouns do not take number markers. The demonstrative pronouns available in Sunwar can be used both for human and non-human entities. The examples are given in the following:

Proximate

eko 'it/this'

Remote

mèko 'that'

Proximate pronoun

The Sunwar lexeme *eko* is used to denote both 'it' and 'this' i.e. the things that are within the proximity or sight in the mind of the speaker. The examples are illustrated in the following.

- (1) eko nəmza-ka báʔ-t^h
This bag-one be-PST.3SG
'This is a bag'

- (2) go eko mə-dáʔ.nu.ŋ
I it NEG-love.NPST.1sg
'I do not love it'

- (3) méʔ-mi eko p^hu -puki gè-ta
He -ERG this flower.PL give-PST.3sg
'He gave these flowers.'

Remote pronoun

The Sunwar lexeme *mèko* is used to denote 'that' referred to the person or thing(s) which are not within the proximity or sight in the mind of the speaker. The examples are illustrated in the following:

- (4) mèko mur rim-tʃjo báʔ-b
that man good-ADJ AUX-NPST.3SG
'That man is good'
- (5) mèko toktʃe-puki sáppan gjur-tʃjo báʔ-b
that mango-PL very sour-ADJ AUX-NPST.3SG
'Those mangoes are very sour.'

3.3 INTERROGATIVE PRONOUNS

The interrogative pronouns or the WH-words in Sunwar can be classified into two subtypes i.e. (i) Basic interrogative pronouns or (ii) derived interrogative pronouns in terms of their structure.

Basic interrogative pronouns

The basic interrogative pronouns are those which are un-derived roots of the language as can be seen in the following.

Sunwar	Gloss
sú	'who'
mar	'what'
gena	'when'



- dopa 'how'
- tei 'where'
- (6) *méʔ-ã laub sú-meʔ*
She-POSS brother who-AUX ?
'Who is her brother?'
- (7) *eko már-imʔ*
This what-AUX ?
'What is this?'
- (8) *Mina gena zà-bʔ*
Mina when come-NPST.3SG ?
'When Mina will come?'
- (9) *pʰõ dópa tʃel-neʔ*
Car how repair-NPST.2SG ?
'How do you repair the car?'
- (10) *tei báʔ-nimʔ*
Where AUX-NPST.3PL?
'Where do they live?'

Derived interrogative pronoun

Derived interrogative pronouns in Sunwar are mainly derived from the basic interrogative pronouns *su* 'who' and *már* 'what' by suffixing case markers *-ke*, *-kəl*, and *-de* 'adverbializer' to the basic interrogative nouns as illustrated in the following

- (11) *sú-ke*
[*sú* 'who' + *ke* 'GEN']
sú-ke 'whose'

For example, (i) *eko kʰjöpət sú-ke báʔ-bʔ*
This book who-GEN AUX-NPST.3SG ?
'Whose book is this?'

- (12) *sú-kəl*
[*su* 'who' + *kəl* 'ACC']
sú-kəl 'whom'

For example, (i) *gé sú-kəl nəm pai-ne*
You who-ACC love do-NPST.2SG
'Whom do you love?'

(13) *már-de*

[már 'what' + de 'ADVERBIALIZER']

már-de 'why'

For example, (i) *már-de sappan gjãihtfo bá?-ne ?*
 what-ADV very angry AUX-NPST.2SG?
 'Why are you so angry?'

3.4 REFLEXIVE PRONOUNS

The reflexive pronouns in Sunwar is realized by the marker *a-ma* 'self' followed by the pronouns as can be seen in the following examples

(14) *go a-ma nel toktje-puki zá-ta-ŋ*
 I GEN-self all mango-PI eat.PST.1SG
 'I myself ate all the mangoes'

(15) *mé? a-ma ka p^hõ gjap-t^h*
 She GEN-self one car buy-PST.3SG
 'She herself bought a car'

(16) *gé a-ma nel ziz zá-te*
 you GEN-self all sweet eat-PST.2SG
 'You yourself ate all the sweet'

(17) *go-puki a-ma ŋa gjãih-tik*
 we GEN-self fish catch-PST.1PL
 'We ourselves caught the fish'

(18) *méko-puki a-ma gè-pai-tem*
 they GEN-self work-do-PST.3PL
 'They themselves did the work'

3.5 INDEFINITE PRONOUNS

Indefinite pronouns are the types of pronoun that refers to unknown or an unidentified person place or thing. The indefinite pronouns are again further divided into two parts viz. positive and negative indefinite pronouns. The positive indefinite pronouns are found in reduplicated forms as shown in the following

**Positive Indefinite Pronouns**

The positive indefinite pronouns of Sunwar are:

Sunwar	Gloss
<i>súi-súi</i>	'anybody'
<i>tei-tei</i>	'anywhere'
<i>mārai-mārai</i>	'anything'
<i>genai-genai</i>	'anytime'

(19) *eko súisúi-mi pə-ne tʃab-bə*
 This anybody-ERG do-INF can-NPST.3SG
 'Anybody can do this'

(20) *go teitei lə-ne tʃab-nu-ŋ*
 I anywhere go-INF can-NPST-1SG
 'I can go anywhere.'

(21) *go-kəl bresepətʃa mərəimārai ge-i-ni-de*
 I-ACC to-write anythinggive-REQ-HON-ADV
 'Give me anything to write.'

(22) *gé genaigenai lə-ne tʃab-ne*
 You anytime go-INF can-NPST.2SG
 'You can go at anytime.'

Negative Indefinite pronouns

The negative indefinite pronouns are not reduplicated

Sunwar	Gloss
<i>súijo</i>	'nobody'
<i>tekeijo</i>	'nowhere'
<i>mārijo</i>	'nothing'
<i>genaijo</i>	'never'

(23) *eko súijo-mi pə-ne tʃab-bə*
 This nobody-ERG do-INF can-NPST.3SG
 'Nobody can do this'



- (24) *ressi tekeijo mǎ-bá?*
Copy nowhere NEG-AUX
'The copy is nowhere.'
- (25) *gé-mi go-kəl mǎraijo gè-tini*
You-ERGI-DAT nothing give-PST-2SG.HON
'You gave me nothing'
- (26) *gé genaijo mǎ-du-te*
You never NEG-fail-PST.2SG
'You never failed.'

4. CONCLUSION

- Sunwar is a Sino-Tibetan language of the Tibeto-Burman family and a member of the Kiranti branch of Himalayan group.
- We can conclude from the above analysis that the pronouns in Sunwar can take case markers but it lacks number markers and gender distinction.
- Pronouns in Sunwar can be classified into (i) Personal pronouns, (ii) Demonstrative pronouns, (iii) Interrogative pronouns, (iv) Reflexive pronouns, (v) Indefinite pronouns.
- Personal pronouns can be distinguished in three ways in terms of person and it also shows two way distinctions in terms of number.
- Demonstrative pronouns are classified on the basis of proximity and remoteness.
- Interrogative pronouns are classified into basic and derived interrogative pronouns. The derived interrogative pronouns are

derived from basic interrogative pronouns like *sú* 'who' and *már* 'what'.

- The indefinite pronouns are divided into positive and negative indefinite pronouns.

ABBREVIATIONS

1	first	GEN	Genitive
2	second	INF	Infinitive
3	third	NEG	Negative
ACC	Accusative	NPST	Non-Past
ADV	Adverbializer	PST	Past
ADJ	Adjective	PL	Plural
AUX	Auxiliary	POSS	Possessive
ERG	Ergative	SG	Singular number

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