



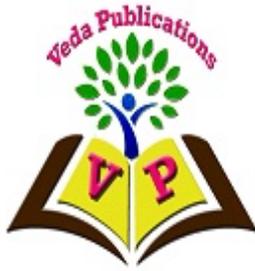
RESEARCH ARTICLE

**NEGATION IN WESTERN RENGMA: A BRIEF STUDY**Rinky Baruah^{1*}, Dr. Paramita Purkait²^{1*} (Ph.D. Scholar, Assam University, Silchar.)²(Assistant Professor, Assam University, Silchar.)

Emails: rinkybaruah19@gmail.com, drparamita74@gmail.com

Doi: <https://doi.org/10.54513/JOELL.2025.12308>**ABSTRACT**

This present study emphasizes the analysis of the negation in Western Rengma grammatically and semantically, which contributes to the word formation processes of the language remarkably. The process of adding a suffix to a word to change its meaning, often expressing negation or the opposite of the original meaning, can be termed as negation in Western Rengma. This morphological process enables the formation of words that express negation and contradiction in a language. Negation in Western Rengma is typically expressed through certain suffixes attached to the verb or other word classes to indicate that something is not happening or is untrue. This paper will discuss the nature of negation in Western Rengma and its occurrences in different types of sentences.

**Article history:**

Received on : 14-08-2025

Accepted on : 15-09-2025

Available online: 29-09-2025

Keywords : *Negation, Suffix, Western Rengma, Tibeto-Burman*



1. INTRODUCTION

Western Rengma, one of the varieties of Rengma, is spoken in the Eastern part of the Karbi Anglong district of Assam and in Dimapur, Nagaland. Rengma belongs to the Angami-Pochuri group of the Tibeto-Burman language family. The total population of Rengma was 62,951 according to the 2011 census. They can be classified into four groups: Northern Rengma (*Kandinyu*) spoken in the districts of Wokha and Kohima in Nagaland; Central Rengma (*Direnyu*) spoken in the Tseminyu district in Kohima; Southern Rengma (*Thehenyu*) spoken in the bordering regions of Nagaland and Manipur; and Western Rengma (*Terüpvunyu*), in the Eastern part of Karbi Anglong, Assam, and Dimapur, Nagaland.

Western Rengma, like other Naga tribes, have a rich cultural heritage that includes traditional dance, music, cuisine, and attire. Traditionally, they are involved in agriculture, cultivating rice and millet, along with vegetables, fruits, and betelnut. They also make handicrafts and weave. Although practicing animism, the Western Rengma gradually adopted Christianity throughout time, and today, churches play a significant role in their community.

2. PREVIOUS WORKS AND METHODOLOGY

A very few works have been undertaken in Western Rengma, of which 'A Study of Tenselessness in Rengma (Western)' by Monali Longmailai is one. She focuses on the serial verb construction (SVC), which is crucial in establishing the sequence of Tense-Aspect-Mood (TAM) and talks about the tense-aspect-mood elements present in Western Rengma. Additionally, in the book *The Rengma Nagas* by JP Mills where he

described the sociocultural features of the society and mentioned that Western Rengma had been split into two sections, the Northern and Southern regions, and these two regions are called Ntenyi and Nzong, respectively. Furthermore, John S. Rengma's work, *Jo Kenjih Do Latsishwu (Grammar & Words)*, included fundamental Western Rengma grammar.

Another notable work on '*Western Rengma (Karbi Anglong, India)- Language Snapshot*' (Longmailai et al., 2020) on ethnolinguistic research on Western Rengma stands out as one of the earliest scholarly efforts to document this lesser-known language. Identified locally as *Terüpvunyu* (/tərYɸuɲu/), Western Rengma is part of the Angami-Pochuri subgroup within the Tibeto-Burman language family. Before this study, the language had remained largely undocumented, with very limited data available about its structure and use.

Since no research work has been done on the negation of Western Rengma until now, the present study is the first attempt to provide insight into the negation process in Western Rengma.

Concerning the methodology, the most widely used techniques in field linguistics, questionnaires, interviews, and observation methods were used to gather the primary data for this study. During the fieldwork, a group of men and women between the ages of 25-60 provided most words and sentences. Language speakers were interviewed to collect the data needed for the study. The research was conducted in the village called Nkhenlari, situated in the Karbi Anglong (East). The collected data were analyzed by following the Leipzig Glossing Rules.



Books, journals, articles, magazines, and Ph.D. theses were among the secondary sources that were taken into consideration in addition to the original source.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objectives of the study are :

1. To analyze the process of negation in Western Rengma,
2. To study the functions and occurrences of negations in the language.

4. NEGATION IN WESTERN RENGMA

Negation is “a process or construction in grammatical and semantic analysis which typically expresses the contradiction of some or all of a sentence’s meaning. (Crystal, 2008).” Negation in Western Rengma is marked through suffixation. Regardless of whether the verb is transitive or intransitive, the negative marker is always attached to it. Western Rengma has three negative suffixes: *-ni*, *-mu*, and *-nde*. The negative suffixes *-mu* and *-nde* are attached to the noun and verb roots, respectively, and the negator *-ni* is the prohibitive negative in the language. The uses of these negative morphemes differ depending on the context in which it is used. The negative suffix *-mu* appears with the non-imperative form of a verb, while the negative suffix *-nde* occurs with the non-imperative form of a noun as a sort of statement in the speaker’s utterance. The negative suffix *-nde* also functions as a negative particle in the language. In Western Rengma, an affirmative statement is transformed into an opposite statement by inserting the negative marker *-m* (allomorph of *-mu*) into the verb roots. The occurrence of negation in language

varies with respect to sentence types, context, word class, and indefiniteness.

4.1. THE NEGATIVE *-mu*

The negative suffix *-mu* in Western Rengma is the most frequently used negation that occurs in post-verbal constructions in the language. However, its occurrences differ when the verb takes tense marking, such as when the main verb is in the past or future form, the verb is suffixed by the negative marker *-mu* whereas, if the verb takes tense marking as the future the negative *-mu* is employed as *-m* (allomorph of *-mu*) as shown in the following examples.

- | | | | | | |
|----|---------------------------|------------|------------|-------------|-------------|
| 1. | <i>lenju-gi</i> | <i>tʃi</i> | <i>-ma</i> | | |
| | +HUMAN-FEM | cry | -PRES | | |
| | ‘The girl is crying.’ | | | | |
| 2. | <i>lenju-gi</i> | <i>tʃi</i> | <i>-mu</i> | <i>-ma</i> | |
| | +HUMAN-FEM | cry | -NEG | -PRES | |
| | ‘The girl is not crying.’ | | | | |
| 3. | <i>a-le</i> | <i>baŋ</i> | <i>nʃi</i> | <i>-nʃa</i> | |
| | 1PS-NOM | cook | want | -PRES | |
| | ‘I want to cook.’ | | | | |
| 4. | <i>a-le</i> | <i>baŋ</i> | <i>nʃi</i> | <i>-mu</i> | <i>-nʃa</i> |
| | 1PS-NOM | cook | want | -NEG | -PRES |
| | ‘I do not want to cook.’ | | | | |

The above sets of sentences demonstrate the affirmative sentences that are negated by the insertion of the negative suffix *-mu* to the verbs that take the present. The same construction of sentences loses its scope when the verb changes into the past or the future.



5. *a-le tu te -m -jɔ -ma*
1PS-NOM rice eat -NEG -IMPF -PST
'I did not eat rice.'

6. *a-le tu te -m -te*
1PS-NOM rice eat -NEG -FUT
'I will not eat rice.'

The occurrences of the negative marker *-mu* are not limited to the negating affirmative sentences but also occur in both yes/no and wh-questions. The interrogatives occur in the medial position of a construction, and the negation *-mu* precedes the tense marker of a construction.

7. *nne det^he-ɔ re -mu -njɔ*
2PS QM-EXP come -NEG -PRES
'Why are you not coming?'

8. *nne det^he-ɔ le-t^he -mu -njɔ*
2PS QM-EXP song-sing -NEG -PRES
'Why are you not singing?'

The morpheme for yes/no interrogatives in Western Rengma is *-le*, which occurs in the final position of a construction where the negation *-mu* always precedes the interrogative marker.

9. *nne lasi gɔŋ -mu le*
2PS school go -NEG QM
'Don't you go to school?'

10. *nne lasi gɔŋ -m -kɔ -he le*
2PS school go -NEG -PST. -PERF QM
'Didn't you go to school?'

11. *n-pu nbru -mu le*
2PS-father sick -NEG QM
'Isn't your father sick?'

12. *nne kahaŋ gɔŋ -m -te le*
2PS church go -NEG -FUT QM
'Won't you go to the church?'

The above construction of sentences shows the occurrences of the negation *-mu* and *-m* in different instances where the yes/no interrogative follows the negative suffix (*-mu/-m*) attached to the main verb. Here, in the sentences above, one important aspect to be observed is that the tense markers always precede the interrogative marker. The occurrences and functions of the negative suffix *-mu* are very prominent in Western Rengma, where its occurrences are not restricted to verbal roots only; as demonstrated in the affirmative and negative sentences below, this marker also has a semantic purpose.

13. *ram-le ka-nju -he*
ram-NOM house-LOC -EXIST
'Ram is at home.'

14. *ram-le ka-nju -he -he -mu*
ram-NOM house-LOC -EXIST -+ANIMATE-NEG
'Ram is not at home.'

15. *lasi-le ka-nju -dzi*
letter-NOM house-LOC -EXIST
'The letter is in the house.'



16. *lasi-le ka-nju -dzi -mu*

book-NOM house-LOC -EXIST -NEG

'The book is not in the house.'

In the sentences above, the occurrence of the marker *-he* is associated with the animate nouns functioning as existential marker (also serves as a perfective aspect in the language) as in (13), the subject of the construction is a human noun, whereas the marker *-dzi* is associated with the inanimate nouns, as demonstrated in the sentence (15). Both markers function as existentiality and are turned into negative constructions by adding the negative suffix *-mu* in (14 & 16).

4.2. THE NEGATIVE *-nde*

The negative marker *-nde* occurs as a negative particle that negates the existentiality of the noun. This negative suffix is only added to the nominal roots, irrespective of the tense marking of the sentence constructions. It is to be mentioned that this negation occurs in the final position of a construction post-nominally. The sentences below demonstrate the occurrences and functions of the negative suffix *-nde*, which also functions as a negative particle in the language.

17. *di-bɔŋ -nju di -nde*

water-pond -LOC water -NEG

'There is no water in the pond.'

18. *ka-nju sakkɔ-nde*

house-LOC rice-NEG

'There is no rice at home.'

19. *ka-nju tarrɔ-nde*

House-LOC hen-NEG

'There is no hen in the house.'

20. *ka-nju tahi-nde*

house-LOC dog-NEG

'There is no dog in the house.'

The negative particle *-nde* is attached only to the nominal roots. It is employed in a declarative construction and cannot occur interchangeably with the negative suffix *-mu*.

21. *tagge-nde*

bird-NEG

'no bird'

**tagge-mu*

bird-NEG

'no bird'

22. *t^he-nde*

work-NEG

'no work'

**t^he-mu*

work-NEG

'no work'

23. *tabbɔ-nde*

pig-NEG

'no pig'

**tabbɔ-mu*

pig-NEG

'no pig'

24. *tu-nde*

rice-NEG

'no rice.'

**tu-mu*

rice-NEG

'no rice'

The negative marker *-nde* always occurs post-nominally and cannot be used interchangeably with the negative suffix *-mu* since it cannot occur in a declarative construction, and its addition will make the construction meaningless.

**4.3. THE NEGATIVE -ni**

The negation *-ni* performs as the prohibitive marker in Western Rengma, where the post-nominal pattern applies. The occurrence and functions of the prohibitive marker *-ni* in the language are illustrated below in the following examples.

25. a. *zɔ* 'say' > *zɔ-ni* 'don't say'
 b. *tʃi* 'cry' > *tʃi-ni* 'don't cry'
 c. *re* 'come' > *re-ni* 'don't come'
 d. *tiŋ* 'run' > *tiŋ-ni* 'don't run'
 e. *ti* 'walk' > *ti-ni* 'don't walk'

Analyzing the above-mentioned examples in sentences where in a prohibitive construction the negative marker *-ni* is always accompanied by the negative suffix *-m*, as shown in the sentences below:

26. *tu te-ni-m*
 rice eat-PROH-NEG
 'Don't eat rice.'
27. *tebul-nju dʒet-ni-m*
 table-LOC sleep-PROH-NEG
 'Don't sleep on the table.'
28. *tebul-nju zi-ni-m*
 table-LOC write-PROH-NEG
 'Don't write on the table.'
29. *a-le baŋ-ni-m*
 1PS-NOM COOK-PROH-NEG
 'I don't cook.'

4.4. NEGATIVE INDEFINITE

The negative indefinites in Western Rengma are expressed by the negation *-da*. The negative suffix *-da* is attached to the indefinite pronouns as illustrated in the examples below:

30. a. *me-da* > 'no-one'
 b. *t^ha-da* > 'nothing'
 c. *nju-da* > 'nowhere'

In Western Rengma, the use of negative indefinites also leads to a double negative construction as shown in the sentences below:

31. *tamme me-da a-ka-nju re-mu*
 +HUMAN one-NEG 1PS-house-LOC come-NEG
 'No one comes to my house.'
32. *tamme me-da ka-nju -he-mu*
 +HUMAN one-NEG house-LOC -EXIST-NEG
 'No one is at home.'
33. *hi-ge-le t^ha -da sa-mu*
 PROX-MASC-NOM something-NEG know-NEG
 'He knows nothing.'

The above sets of examples are negative declarative sentences where the object is negated by adding a suffix *-da* to the indefinite pronouns *me* (allomorph of *kamme* 'one') and *t^ha* 'something or thing'. Here, in the above constructions, the verbs are also negated by adding the negative suffix *-mu*. In addition, the double negation in pronouns and verbs is employed in the examples above, which not only negates the object but also negates the action.

5. FINDINGS OF THE PRESENT STUDY

Throughout the study of this research work, the following results have been observed:

- a. The negative markers in Western Rengma are: *-mu*, *-nde*, *-ni*, and *-da*.



- b. All the negative markers are bound morphemes and hence are suffixes in nature.
- c. The most frequently used negative suffix in the language is *-mu*, which is associated with most of the word classes of the language, like nouns, pronouns, verbs, and adjectives.
- d. The negative suffix *-nde* also functions as a negative particle in the language.
- e. Western Rengma has different terms for existentiality for both animate (*-he*) and inanimate nouns (*-dʒi*).
- f. The presence of double negation is one of the prominent morphological features of Western Rengma.

Abbreviations

1PS	First Person Singular
2PS	Second Person Singular
EXIST	Existential
EXP	Expressive
FEM	Feminine
FUT	Future Tense
LOC	Locative
MASC	Masculine
NEG	Negative
NOM	Nominative
PRES	Present Tense
PST	Past Tense
PERF	Perfective
PROH	Prohibitive
PROX	Proximate
QM	Question marker

6. CONCLUSION

The process of negation in Western Rengma is morphologically formed by suffixing the negative marker to its constituents. The discussion above suggests that the four negative markers in Western Rengma occur and function in different contexts respectively. The negative suffix *-mu* is the most frequently used, with the marker *-nde* functioning as a negative particle that denotes non-existentiality. On the other hand, the negative suffix *-ni* functions as a prohibitive marker, and the suffix *-da* functions as an opposite constituent.

The negative particle *-nde* is attached only to the nominal roots. It is employed in a declarative construction and cannot occur interchangeably with the negative suffix *-mu*. The morpheme for yes/no interrogatives in Western Rengma is *-le*, which occurs in the final position of a construction where the interrogative marker is always preceded by the negative *-mu*. In Western Rengma, where the post-



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) awarded the first author a Centrally Administered Doctoral Fellowship (File No. RFD/2022-23/GEN/LNGST/345). The research article is the outcome of the author's PhD research, which was funded by the ICSSR (New Delhi). However, the data presented, and the conclusion drawn are solely the author's responsibility.

REFERENCES

- Brahma, Mihir Kumar. (2014). Negation in the Southern dialect of Bodo. *Language in India*, 14 (5): 179-191.
- Brahma, Pratima. (2021). Comparative study of Negation in Bodo and Dimasa. *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 26 (7): 01-07. DOI: 10.9790/0837-2607030107
- Ngullie, Yantsubeni. (2019). Negation in Lotha. *Language in India*, 19 (6): 449-455.
- Longmailai, Monali (2019). *A Study of Tenselessness in Rengma (Western)*. In *Languages*, 4 no. 4:89. <https://doi.org/10.3390/languages4040089> accessed on 15 August 2025.
- Longmailai, Monali, et. al. (2020). *Western Rengma (Karbi Anglong, India)- Language Snapshot*. In Peter K. Austin, Ed. *Language Documentation and Description*, Vol. 17, London, EL Publishing: 82-86.
- REVD. Sebu, Giren. (2005). *Njang Pethinyu Chalilü: Traditional Folk Songs of the Rengma Nagas*. Akhoiphuta, Jonkhphar, Karbi Anglong. REVD. Giren Sebu (Self-published)
- Mills, JP. (1937) *The Rengma Nagas*. London: Macmillan and co. Limited.
- War, J., Singh, S.K., Lyndoh, S.A., & Khyreim. (2014). *Tibeto-Burman Linguistics of North-East India*. Guwahati, EBH Publishers.