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2026**RESEARCH ARTICLE****GENDER MARKER IN HRANGKHOL****Elizabeth Hrangkhoh***Research Scholar, Assam University, Silchar*Email: elizachorai@gmail.comDOI: <https://doi.org/10.54513/JOELL.2026.13305>**Article history:**

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ABSTRACT

Hrangkhoh is one of the Kuki-Chin languages spoken mostly in Dima Hasao, Cachar, Karimganj and Hailakandi districts of Assam and Tripura, and some parts of Mizoram, Manipur and Meghalaya. The language falls under the North Kuki-Chin sub-groups of the Kuki Chin language family (Lewis et al., 2013). This paper attempts to describe the gender markers in the Sak variety of Hrangkhoh. The gender markers for [+human] are 'pa' for masculine and 'nu' for feminine gender. Whereas the gender markers for [-human, + animal] are 'fal' for masculine and 'pui' for feminine. The neuter gender can be identified by their own lexical term, such as 'naite' for a child and 'naipang' for children. It is observed that the morphemes 'pu' and 'pi' have multiple functions. First, 'pu' serves as a gender marker for both the maternal grandfather and paternal grandfather, as well as maternal uncles, while 'pi' functions as a gender marker for both the maternal grandmother and paternal grandmother. Second, they are used as honorific terms to show respect for elders. Third, they are used to categorise males and females in authority or persons highly regarded in society.

Keywords: *Hrangkhoh, Kuki-Chin, Gender markers, Hrangkhoh.**Author(s) retain the copyright of this article. Copyright© 2026 VEDA Publications.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

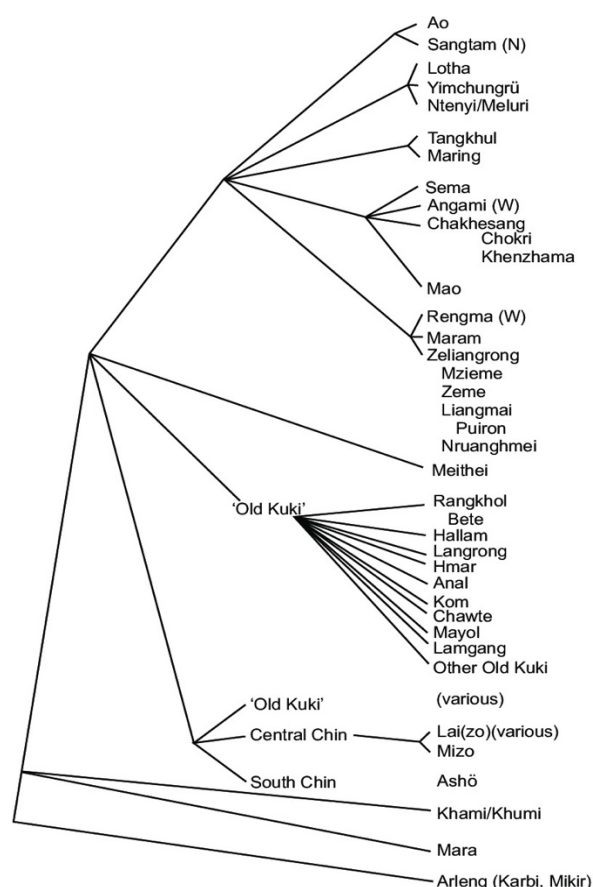
Hrangkhoh is a Kuki-Chin language from the Tibeto-Burman language family spoken across the states of Assam, Manipur, Mizoram and Tripura in northeast India. "Hrangkhoh" is a compound word made up of two syllables: "Hrang" means "the courageous warrior" "Khol" means "group gathering". Hrangkhoh is classified under Central Kuki (VanBik:2007). The total population of the Hrangkhoh community is approximately 18,000-20,000 (according to the Ethnologue source), as mentioned by Eberhard, Simons, and Fenning (2019). It has mainly two varieties: Sak and Thang (Hrangkhoh 2023). Sak Hrangkhoh is spoken in Dima Hasao district of Assam, Manipur, and Mizoram. Thang Hrangkhoh is spoken in Hailakandi and Karimganj districts of Assam and Tripura. Sak Hrangkhoh of Dima Hasao is identified as a standard dialect. As the Kuki-Chin languages share a high amount of cognate sets, while Ranglong, Khelma, Biate, and Kaipeng are mutually intelligible to a great extent compared to all other genetic subgroups of TB languages in northeast India.

2. LANGUAGES CLASSIFICATION

Grierson (1903) has classified Hrangkhoh under the Old Kuki sub-section of the Tibeto-Burman branch of Sino-Tibetan or Tibeto-Chinese speech family. According to Grierson, the Old Kuki Tribe appears to have landed on Lushei soil around a century ago, he added. The Central Chin languages are closely connected to the entire subgroup.

Bradely (1997) classified Hrangkhoh under the Old-Kuki groups of Tibeto-Burman branch of Sino-Tibetan speech family. For the linguistic survey of India, the name "Old Kuki" was created to describe

the several tiny Kuki communities in the Manipur valley and to the west. It encompasses some of the Tripuran Kuki clans, as well as neighboring regions of Bangladesh and Cachar, including Rangkhoh, Bete, Halam, and Ranglong.



**Figure 1: Classification of Kuki-Chin-Naga group
(Bradley, 1997)**

3. OBJECTIVE AND METHODOLOGY

The study aims to investigate gender markers in Hrangkhoh and whether it has dual marking, as in some Kuki-Chin languages, and whether it has grammatical gender, unlike other languages. The required data for the study was collected through several visits and interactions with informants from the Hrangkhoh-inhabiting areas of Assam. The core data was gathered through questionnaires and



conversations with several language informants, both male and female, representing a range of ages. The present study has been carried out through fieldwork in Zion village around Haflong and in Dolaichunga village of Dima Hasao district, Assam. More than 20 informants, aged between 15 and 30 and 45 and 55, were interviewed, and the data were also cross-examined with different age groups of the same community. Android phones, a Zoom HN4 recorder, and additional digital cameras were used for fieldwork photography and cinematography on various occasions.

Both primary and secondary data have been used for the study. As the author is a native speaker of Hrangkhoh, data has also been collected through self-information sources. Here, the necessary data for this study have also been collected data from their parents, teachers, friends, relatives and older people who speak the same variety to run a cross check on the data provided. The majority of the additional data needed has been gathered from secondary sources. Information has been gathered from previously published works, including books, journals, e-books, and theses.

4. LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Corbett (1991:1), the term 'gender' has its origins in the Latin word 'genus' and was passed down through Old French as 'gender'. The original interpretation of the term is rendered as 'kind' or 'sort'. The term 'gender' is employed to refer to both a collection of nouns and the entire category. Thus, a particular language encompasses three genders: masculine, feminine, and neuter. Lyons (1968:283) argues that the three genders of Greek and Latin, namely masculine, feminine, and neuter,

were the primary noun categories acknowledged in their respective grammars. The classical Indo-European languages classify gender into three categories: masculine, feminine, and neutral. Grierson (1904) describes the gender markers of some Kuki-Chin languages, such as Thadou, Paite, and Lushai (Mizo). These languages have distinct markers for both masculine and feminine genders. They use 'pa' for masculine and 'nu' for feminine human gender. However, there is a distinction in the gender markers for nonhuman among these Kuki-Chin groups. (Haokip, 2009; Haokip, 2014; Singh, 2009; Cing, 2017).

The Hrangkhoh language, a member of the Kuki-Chin subgroup of the Tibeto-Burman language family, has been the subject of several linguistic studies. Notable works include:

1. **"A Learner's Book of the Hrangkhoh Language" (2019):** published by the Centre for Endangered Languages at Tezpur University, this primer serves as an introductory resource for individuals interested in learning Hrangkhoh.
2. **"Pronouns in Hrangkhoh" (2019):** This research examines the pronouns used in the Hrangkhoh language, providing an in-depth analysis of their forms and functions.
3. **"Numerals in Hrangkhoh" (2023):** This paper examines the numeral system of the Hrangkhoh language, analyzing its structure and usage.
4. **"Pronouns and pronominal in Hrangkhoh, Vaiphei and Gangte"**



(2023): This work presents an analysis of the pronoun system in Hrangkhoh, discussing various aspects of its usage.

5. "Negation Marking Strategy in Hrangkhoh" (2022): This paper examines strategies for expressing negation in Hrangkhoh and contributes to understanding its syntactic structures.

These works collectively contribute to the documentation and analysis of the Hrangkhoh language, offering valuable resources for linguists and language enthusiasts.

Research on Hrangkhoh was produced as a thesis by Debbarma, Surath, Ph.D. Thesis, Department of Linguistics, Assam University, Silchar. The Structure of Hrangkhaw: A Kuki-Chin Language, 2019.

Some of the ongoing work on Hrangkhoh, 'Descriptive Grammar of Hrangkhoh' by Kritika Barman, Ph.D. Scholar, Assam University, Silchar, and 'Language Documentation on Hrangkhoh, Grammatical Sketch' by Nawaf Zahdaan Helmi, Ph.D. Scholar, IIT Bombay.

Some unpublished papers on Hrangkhoh, the current researcher has worked on are,

Phonemic Inventory of Sak and Thang Hrangkhoh (2023), Pronouns in Hrangkhoh (2019), and Pronouns and pronominal in Hrangkhoh, Vaiphei, Gangte (2023). Other literary works on the socio-cultural aspect of Hrangkhoh available are listed in the literature review.

5. GENDER IN HRANGKHOL

Gender is a grammatical category used to analyze word classes that display contrasts such as masculine, feminine, and neuter, and animate and inanimate—David Crystal (sixth ed., 2008). The word 'gender' is used not just for a group of nouns but also for the whole category; thus, gender markers in Hrangkhoh are feminine and masculine gender.

Gender in Hrangkhoh can be broadly classified into two categories: human and nonhuman animate. The human natural gender is marked by *-pa/pu* for male and *-nu/pi* for female. The nonhuman gender of other animate beings is indicated by *-pui* and *ʈʈal* as female and male, respectively. In the case of fowl family *-pui* is for female and *kʰoŋ* for male.

Like other Kuki-Chin languages, Hrangkhoh does not exhibit any grammatical gender but gender is determined based on meaning (cf. Haokip, 2009). In Hrangkhoh, the gender markers for human beings and animals are different. Essentially, the lexical meaning of *'pa'* means 'father' and *'nu/ne'* means 'mother'. Generally, both morphemes can be used to indicate gender, thus serving as gender markers.

5.1 GENERIC HUMAN NOUNS

In Hrangkhoh, in case of human nouns having generic names, male and female are indicated by the suffix *-pa* and *-pu* 'male' and *-nu* and *-pi* 'female' respectively. In other words, the suffix *-pa* and *-pu* indicate male, while *-nu* *-pi* indicates female.



Table 1: Generic nouns

Generic		Male		Female	
nai	'children'	naipa	'son'	nainu	'daughter'
tu	'grandchildren'	tupa	'grandson'	tunu	'grand-daughter'
rual	'friend'	rualpa	'boyfriend'	rualnu	'girlfriend'
tar	'old age'	tarpa	'old man'	tarnu	'old lady'

4. 2. PROFESSIONAL TERMS

In Hrangkhoh, the professional terms, both native and borrowed, indicate the male and female genders by adding the morphemes *-pa/-pu* for 'masculine' and *-nu/pi* for 'feminine', respectively, as shown in Table 2. Interestingly, the use of the gender markers *-pi* and *-pu* is not very productive in Hrangkhoh, whereas *-pi* and *-nu* are preferred because they are more formal and serve as honorific markers.

Table 2: Professional terms

Sl.no	Masculine	Feminine	gloss
1	daktor-pa	daktor-nu	'doctor'
2	pastor-pa	pastor-nu	'pastor'
3	k ^h altu-pa	k ^h altu-nu	'driver'
4	nárs-pa	nárs-nu	'nurse'
5	ziaktu-pa	ziaktu-nu	'writer'
6	suok-pa	suok-nu	'servant'
7	ir̥tutirtu-pa	ir̥tutirtu-nu	'teacher'
8	inru-pa	inru-nu	'robber'



Interestingly, in Hrangkhoh from the above analysis, it can be seen that in some of the respective data shown, the infix *in* is added before the masculine *-pa* and *-nu* in the feminine.

5.2. Nonhuman Animate Nouns

In Hrangkhoh, there are different gender markers for animals and birds. The masculine markers for animals are *-tjal* and *-pa*; the feminine is *-pui*. Whereas for birds, masculine markers are *k^hon*, *pa*, and for feminine markers are *-pui* (Dunda:2008).

Table 3: Gender markers for nonhuman animate nouns

Masculine	gloss	Feminine	gloss
serat-tjal	'ox'	serat-pui/ seratpui-nu	'female-cow'
vok-tjal	'male-pig'	vok-pui	'female-pig'
men-tjal	'male-cat'	men-pui	'female-cat'
ark ^h on	'cook'	ar-pui/arpuinu	'hen'
va-pa	'male bird'	va-nu/vapuinu	'female bird'
artja-pa	'jungle-fowl'	artja-nu	'jungle-fowl'
siel	'cow'	sepuinu	'female-cow'
siknjir	'ant'	siknjir	'ant'
na	'fish'	na-nu	'fish-female'
kel-tjal	'goat-male'	kel-pui	'female goat'
mirul	'snake'	rul-pui	'python'

The use of suffix *-tjal-pa-k^hon* for masculine and feminine *-pui*, *nu* in the above Table 3, shows the gender markers in nonhuman animate nouns. Some nouns do not have a gender marker in Hrangkhoh.



Whereas in Hrangkhoh, the gender of these nouns can be deduced from their semantics. Some do not have a gender at all, like fish and snakes, in Hrangkhoh.

(i). Gender in Insects, Worms, and Reptiles

Gender is not indicated for insects, birds, worms, and reptiles in the languages, except hen and cock, where -*k^hoŋ* indicates masculine and -*pui* indicates feminine in Hrangkhoh; however, in some cases, birds are indicated as masculine or feminine.

Table 4: No gender marking in insects and birds

Sl.no	Birds	gloss
1	p ^h ervali	'pigeon'
2	vatok	'duck'
3	vaâk	'crow'
4	irmu	'eagle'
5	vaiki	'parrot'
6	dumde	'firefly'
7	tuit ^h antenu	'dragonfly'
8	p ^h elep	'butterfly'
9	k ^h anlai	'cockroach'
10	lonak	'caterpillar'

(ii). Reptiles

In the case of reptiles, gender is also not indicated in this language. Table 5 lists the reptiles in the Hrangkhoh languages.



Table 5: Reptiles

Sl.no	Reptiles	gloss
1	ole	'crocodile'
2	uitfok	'frog'
3	mirul	'snake'
4	satel	'tortoise'
5	soksop ^{ho}	'cobra'
6	tokke	'gecko'
7	laikin	'lizard'
8	t ^h einlei	'squirrel'
9	rulpui	'python'
10	ibui	'massasauge'

(iii) Universe terms

In-universe terms, Hrangkhoh does not exhibit grammatical gender, as shown in Table 6. In the context of Hrangkhoh, it is important to note that the term 'earthquake' also goes by the name *'h̄in̄nu/h̄in̄nu-pui*. The -*pui* in this instance, however, refers to the earthquake's magnitude rather than the gender marker that is applied to nonhuman nouns.

Table 6: Universe Terms

Sl.no	Universe	gloss
1	misa	'sun'
2	t ^h a	'moon'



3	arsî	'star'
4	irvan	'sky'
5	muol	'mountain'
6	sûmp ^h ai	'cloud'
7	vûr	'snow'
8	ruo	'rain'
9	ramtjar	'desert'
10	irial	'hailstone'
11	k ^h onri	'thunder'
12	kolirték	'lightning'
13	pil-tjim	'landslide'
14	tuiduŋ	'river'
15	p ^h aivuo	'air'

4.3. Lexical Opposites

Some nouns in Hrangkhoh can denote either males or females, but they cannot function as generic terms. The opposite gender distinction is shown in Table 7.

Table 7: Lexical opposites in Hrangkhoh

Masculine		Feminine	
pasal	'husband'	donjma	'wife'
naipa	'nephew'	nainu	'niece'



nutja	'female brother'	farnu	'male sister'
paruol	'group of males'	nuruol	'group of females'
pasal	male	nupanj	female
pa	father	nu/ne	mother
naipasal	son	nainupanj	daughter
moipa	groom	moinu	bride

These nouns inherently carry gender features. For example, the nouns like *ruat^ha-donma* 'bachelor' and *karanj* 'uncle' do not have any gender marker, but they have a masculine feature, and *ni* 'aunty' also has no marker, but through its semantics it indicates it as feminine.

4. 4. GENDER MARKERS FOR ANIMATE [+HUMAN]

The gender markers for human beings are '-pa' and '-nu'. '-pa' is the masculine marker, while '-nu' is the feminine marker. Both of these markers are suffixed to the noun. The gender markers for human beings are illustrated in the following examples.

1(a). puon sop-pa a-hunj tun-ta
 cloth wash-M 3-come arrive-PFV
 'The washerman has arrived.

1(b). puon sop-nu a-honj tun-ta
 Cloth wash-F 3-come arrive-PFV
 'The washer woman has arrived.

4.5. GENDER MARKERS FOR ANIMATE [-HUMAN]

For gender reference of animals, '-tjal' is suffixed to the noun to indicate the masculine gender, and '-pui' is suffixed to the noun to indicate the feminine gender. The argument is exemplified from 3(a)-3(b).

3(a). ui-tjal-in mi in-khat a-sie
 dog-M-ERG person CLF- one 3-bite
 The male dog bit one person.



3(b). ui -pui -nu-n nai a -nei -ta dog-

F- mother-ERG baby 3-deliver-PFV

'The female dog (bitch) has delivered a baby'.

a. Functions of the gender markers '-pu' and '-pi'

The gender markers-pu and -pi are used in kinship terms such as grandfather and grandmother, respectively. Besides, they occur before the referent nouns. This is illustrated in examples 4(a)-4(d).

4(a). ki-pu hi kum 80 ani

1SG-grandfather DECL year 80 3- PFT

My grandfather is 80 years old.

4(b). ki-pi hi an-k^hur

1SG-grandmother DECL 3-sick

'My grandmother is sick.

4(c). ki-pu bul-in ani-sân

1SG-grandfather bul-ERG 3-help

'My grandfather Bul helped me.

4(d). pi-avonj dam-ma

Grandmother-3-vonj well-NEG

'Grandmother Avong is unwell.

Interestingly, the gender markers '-pu' and '-pi' are also used to refer to persons with authority or high social status.

4.6. NEUTER OR COMMON GENDER IN HRANGKHOL

Hrangkhol also exhibits a neuter or common gender, where the presence of the lexical noun indicates the gender. The neuter gender is exemplified in (8-10) and Table 8.



Table 8: Neuter gender

Sl.no	Neuter	gloss
1	k ^h irki	'window'
2	mikôt	'door'
3	tùkver	'ceiling'
4	intʃuŋ	'roof'
5	zalmun	'bed'
6	toinel	'chair'
7	tui	'water'
8	lek ^h a	'book'
9	dár	'bell'
10	mei	'fire'
11	meiser	'lamp'

(8). Kari-in kel a-suk t^hat

vehicle-ERG goat 3-hit kill

'A vehicle hit and killed the goat.

(9). sièl ki vai zot

cow 1-SG rear want

'I want to rear a cow.

(10). naite in-k^hat-na a-mân

Child CLF-one-NML 3-got



The child got first place.

Hrangkhol, all inanimate nouns are neuter, *such as* *mikôt* 'door', *dâr* 'bell', and *lek^ha* 'book'. There are certain animate (human) beings for whom the gender markers are not attached. But it is innately understood by the native speaker that the lexical noun itself carries the gender specifics. It is illustrated in Table 9 below.

Table 9: Gender specifics intrinsic in the lexical items

Sl.no	Lexical items	gloss
1	ni	'paternal aunties'
2	karaj	'paternal aunty's husband'
3	t ^h oibop	'teenager'
4	ruot ^h arte	'youth-male'
5	dojmate	'youth female'
6	meit ^h ai	'widow'
7	tanj ^h onj	'widower'
8	sanram	'couple'
9	makpa	'son-in-law'

(11). naipaŋ-pa sukul ki-va-t^hak

child-M school 1SG-CON-drop

'I drop school to my boy child.

(12). naipaŋ-nu sukul ki-va-t^hak

child-F school 1SG-CON-drop

'I drop school to my female child'.



In a rare case, the gender of a person is highlighted twice by the presence of gender specifics intrinsic in a lexical noun and the morphological gender suffixes. In examples 11-12, the gender-specific lexical nouns occur with the gender suffixes.

4.7. GENDER SPECIFIC KINSHIP TERMS

There is a specific term for addressing a person in Hrangkhoh that varies by gender and age across different communities. In Hrangkhoh, if a person is a relative or a sibling, there are specific ways to address them. For a grandmother or other elderly figure, it is addressed as *pi*; for men, as *pu*. It is illustrated in Table 10 below.

Table 10: Kinship terms

Sl.no	Masculine	Feminine
1	pu 'grandfather'	pi 'grandmother'
2	pa 'father'	ne/nu 'mother'
3	karaŋ 'paternal aunt husband'	ni 'paternal aunty'
4	pate 'father younyer brothers'	Nute's mother, younger sister
5	pater 'father elder brother'	Neulien's mother, elder sister'
6	tupa 'grand son '	tunu 'granddaughter'
7	Tarpa 'old man'	tarnu 'old women'



8	tarpu 'father-in-law'	Tarpi's mother-in-law'
9	ruotharte 'young man'	dorjmate 'young girl'
10	tanj ^h o 'widower'	meit ^h ai 'widow'

In Hrangkhoh, all elders are addressed as -u before their names to show respect for the elders. This applies to all, irrespective of age differences, for male *u-pa* and female *u-nu*.

4.8. GENDER DISTINCTION IN PERSON NAMES

One of the peculiarities of Kuki-Chin languages is the choice of personal names for males and females, which are distinguished by their semantics. Lexically, certain terms are explicitly designated for male and female names, with the ancestral name attached to the first, middle, and last names. It is simple to distinguish between male and female Hrangkhoh names based on their last names. Examples are presented from Table 11.

Table 11: Ending naming of Hrangkhoh

Sl. no	Masculine	Feminine
1	lien	hoi
2	t ^h an	moi
3	bul	nei
4	moi	kip
5	lal	von



6	zem	zon
7	ril	t ^h in
8	soŋ	boi
9	siek	reŋ
10	lom	tʃun
11	her	ʃi
12	t ^h oi	lom
13	k ^h ûp	k ^h up

Interestingly, Hrangkhoh's last naming system for masculine and feminine genders is common to both *-moi* and *-lom*, which can be used for either gender. However, the rest are only for a particular gender.

4.9. DEMONSTRATIVES AND GENDER IN HRANGKHOL

In Hrangkhoh, specific connotations can emerge when gender indicators appear before or after demonstratives. It can be used as a replacement for a person's name in a noun phrase. The speaker's intention can be inferred from the element order. If the structure of the noun phrase follows the particular noun, the referent is introduced in the conversation orally or to others. The speaker refers to the individual based on the previously constructed context when the gender marker comes directly after the demonstrative (DEM) of the noun.

(13). hi-hi ki tuolbôm-pa

DEM 1SG neighbour-M

'This is my neighbor (male)'.

(14). hi -nu hi

DEM-F DEM

'This female/women'.



(15). so-pa so

DEM-M DEM

'That male/man'.

4.10. DEFINITENESS AND GENDER

In Hrangkhoh, the referent is marked with a gender morpheme to indicate definiteness. Ergative suffixes can mark it on the noun that is followed by third-person singular or plural in the definite gender. Some of the instances are from 16 to 18.

(16). boinun naite a-nei

boi-ERG child 3-own

'Boinu has a child.'

(17). Boinun nai-nupanj a-nei

boinu-ERG child-girl 3-own

'Boinu has a daughter.'

(18). nupanj nu

girl F

'The girl'.

In Hrangkhoh, animate nonhuman nouns can accept gender alone as a reference if the gender of the newborn is in dispute or if the newborn is referred to as a particular person or in a particular response.

5. CONCLUSION

In Hrangkhoh, the lexical items are extensively used to accentuate the distinction between the genders. The lexical items such as 'pa' and 'nu' have multiple functions. It serves as a gender marker for both the masculine and feminine human class of gender. It is also observed that the lexical items such as *pu* and *pi* are employed to address the person of high authority or used as honorific titles. These gender markers are suffixed to the referent NP. In matters concerning the common or neuter gender, the referent lexical noun carries the gender specifics. To

emphasise the referent NP, the gender specific lexical nouns are followed by the morpheme *pa*, *nu* and *pui*. The word-formation processes for gendered nouns in Hrangkhoh primarily involve affixation, compounding, and, occasionally, reduplication, though gender marking is less extensive than in Indo-European languages. Hrangkhoh uses gender-specific affixes to distinguish male and female referents, particularly in kinship terms, occupations, or natural gender distinctions. Reduplication in Kuki-Chin languages is more frequent for plurality, intensification, or ideophones



rather than gender marking. It is somehow found in Hrangkhoh; the reduplicated form *tu-tu* refers to "small male child!", while *nu-nu* refers to "small female child" or an "affectionate child". Gender is only a lexical feature and has no role in showing the grammatical relationship between the nouns and other categories in the sentence. In Hrangkhoh, gender is marked only on animate nouns. Gender for human nouns is marked by suffixing the morpheme *-pa/-pu* for 'masculine' and *-nu/-pi/-ni* and *pui* for 'feminine', respectively, in both languages. For nonhuman animate nouns in Hrangkhoh, the masculine marker is *-tʃal*; the feminine marker is *-pui*. In the case of insects and birds, gender is not marked in languages as a general term; to identify them specifically, they have a grammatical gender marker.

Abbreviations and symbols

1SG First Person Singular

3SG Third Person Singular

DECL Declarative

ERG Ergative

F Feminine

M Masculine

PL Plural

NEG negative ʈ:

Alveolar affricate ɲ:

Velar nasal ɰ:

Aspirated ʈ: voiceless

lateral ɱ: voiceless

nasal ɲ: voiceless

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