GENDER IN MEITEILON

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Typologically languages may be divided into those which have grammatical gender (e.g. Indo-European languages) and those which do not (e.g. Finno-Ugric, Chinese, Mongolian, Tibetan, Burmese, Lushai, Ao, etc.). In this second group of languages, one may include a language like modern Persian, which has completely lost its original Indo-European system of gender. Among gender languages, two gender systems distinguishing masculine and feminine, and three gender systems distinguishing masculine, feminine and neuter, are the most common, although developments in these classificatory systems vary widely from language to language.

Grammatical gender is a surface syntactic means for classifying nouns according to their suffix, the correlation between natural sex and grammatical gender being secondary and imperfect (Fodor 1959, Ibrahim 1973). In this gender resembles nominal class systems, since concord or agreement is the most paramount criterion in either type of system. Gender languages have three basic word classes (Ibrahim 1973, Poplack, Pousada, Sankoff 1982):

1. Words with unmarked or marked inherent gender (nouns)

2. Words with marked concord gender (adjectives, etc.)

3. Those with neither (invariable constituents)

Meiteilon, a Tibeto-Burman language of Assam, has limited gender agreement and limited gender marking on nouns.

1. Noun-adjective gender agreement

We may say roughly that there are three types of agreement phenomena (Greenberg 1978). The first is that of a noun with its immediate modifiers in the noun phrase, e.g. adjective, demonstrative and numeral. The second is predicate agreement, that of a subject noun with its predicate adjective or demonstrative. Greenberg (1963:93) has found that gender agreement between noun and verb is far less frequent than agreement in person and number. The third type of agreement is in anaphoric use.

In French and Spanish, determiners, most adjectives, and pronouns must agree in gender with the head noun; participial verbs also reveal agreement under certain conditions.

In Hindi the noun must agree with adjectives and verbs.

Hindi (1) ətchhi lərki gana gaker skul jati həi

good girl song school go copu.

(A good girl goes to school singing a song)

(2) ətchha lərka gana gaker skul jata həi

good boy song school go copu.

(A good boy goes to school singing a song)

English, on the other hand, has no grammatical (non-anaphoric) gender: the nouns of English cannot be classified in terms of agreement with articles, adjectives or verbs (Palmer 1978, Hockett 1976, Gleason 1966, Ibrahim 1973, Greenberg 1978).

Meiteilon does not have a full grammatical gender system. However, some very restricted agreement is maintained, that is human nouns must agree in gender with their immediate adjectives; non-human and inanimate nouns show no gender agreement with modifiers or verbs. (Adjectives may freely precede or follow nouns.)

(3) /məsək fəzəba pakhəŋ əma iroi-ri/
     handsome   boy   one   swimming

(A handsome boy is swimming)

(4) /məsək fəzəbi ləisabi əma iroi-ri/
     beautiful   girl   one   swimming

(A beautiful girl is swimming)

These two sentences show the agreement between human nouns and adjectives; in (3) the noun pakhəŋ 'boy' agrees with -a 'masculine marker', and in (4) the noun ləisabi 'girl' agrees with -i 'feminine marker'. But with animals there is no agreement between noun and adjective, as in sentences (5)-(7).

(5) /əŋaŋba sən-bi əma səzik ca-ri/
     red   cow-she   one   grass   eating

(A red cow is grazing)

(6) /əŋaŋba sən-laba əma səzik ca-ri/

    red cow-he one grass eating

    (A red bull is grazing)

(7) /hui-əmom əcəuba əma sida tum-li/

    dog-she big one here sleeping

    (A big bitch is sleeping here)

There is also no agreement with inanimate objects:[1]

(8) /əi θəro fəzəba əma pam-y/

    I lily nice one like

    (I like a nice lily)

(9) */əi fəzəbi θəro əsi pam-y/

    I nice lily this like

    *(I like this nice lily)

(10) /məhak-na əcəuba yum əma ləi/

    he big house one buy

    (He buys a big house)

(11) /əi əsəŋba θəmbal əsi pam-y/

    I green lotus this like

    (I like this green lotus)

(12) */əi θəmbal əsəŋbi əsi pam-y/

    I lotus green this like

    *(I like this green lotus)

In closely-related Lushai, Ao, and Paite there is no grammatical gender: the noun has no agreement with articles, verbs, or modifiers, as shown by the following sentences:

Lushai (13) /nula   melθa   ən   inbual/

                girl   beautiful   a   bathing

                (A beautiful girl is taking a bath)

          (14) /taŋbal melθa   ən   inbual/

                boy   beautiful   a   bathing

                (A handsome boy is taking a bath)

Paite   (15) /nunak hoik   khat in tui a liau/

                girl   beautiful   a   swimming

                (A beautiful girl is swimming)

          (16) /taŋval hoik   khat in tui a liau/

                boy   beautiful   a   swimming

                (A handsome boy is swimming)

2. Gender-marking suffixes

Animate nouns in Meiteilon, Ao, and Lushai can be morphologically marked for masculine and feminine gender. There are different gender markers for the human and non-human nouns.

The dialects of the State of Manipur such as Animol, Chiru, Kom, Purum, Koireng, Chote, Anal, etc., have no grammatical gender, but the gender of animates may be indicated by postposed words or suffixes.

In Meiteilon, also, gender is distinguished by postposed words or suffixes:

1. The change of final vowel (/a/ ~ /i/):

nupa 'man'	nupi 'woman'
maiba 'local doctor or priest (m)'	maibi 'local doctor or priest (f)'
isəi-səkpa 'singer' (m)	isəi-səkpi 'singer' (f)
hənuba 'old man'	hənubi 'old woman'
fisaba 'weaver' (m)	fisabi 'weaver' (f)
huranba 'thief' (m)	huranbi 'thief' (f)

2. The addition of the words nupa 'male' and nupi 'female' to human nouns.

minai-nupa 'male servant'	minai-nupi 'female servant'
məca-nupa 'son'	məca-nupi 'daughter'

3. The addition of the words laba 'male' and əmom 'female' to animal nouns.[2]

iroi-laba 'buffalo (m)'	iroi-əmom 'buffalo (f)'
sən-laba 'bull'	sən-əmom 'cow'
hui-laba 'dog (m)'	hui-əmom 'bitch'
cəroi-laba 'a kind of bird (m)'	cəroi-əmom 'a bird (f)'
ŋanu-laba 'duck (m)'	ŋanu-əmom 'duck (f)'

4. Lexical inherent gender (no gender suffix):

pakhəŋ 'boy'	ləisabi 'girl'
piba 'male'	niŋol 'female'
khura 'uncle'	indol 'aunt'
məku 'father-in-law'	mənem 'mother-in-law'
tada 'elder brother'	itəima 'sister-in-law'
məca 'son'	məməu 'sister-in-law' (to the boy's parents)
məpu 'grandfather'	məben 'grandmother'

In Lushai, masculine and feminine are sometimes distinguished by different words, as nula 'a maid' taŋval 'youth', or by suffixing -pa for the masculine or -nu for the feminine to a general word, as boih 'slave', boih-pa 'male slave', boih-nu 'female slave'. In the case of full grown animals -chal is sometime used instead of -pa for the masculine, and -pui is always used for the feminine, as kəl 'goat', kəl-chal 'he-goat', kəl-pui 'she-goat'. Some words are the same in both the masculine and feminine, as u 'elder brother or sister'; nao 'younger brother or sister'. Proper names of the masculine gender end in -a, those of the feminine gender in -i, as Nela, Suaka, Liansailova, Vəli, Lalrumi, Tungi. The names of animals, unless distingushed by a masculine or feminine affix, and all inanimate objects, are neutral in gender.

In Ao, the gender markers -pa and -la are added to specify masculine and feminine genders respectively. These gender markers are the same as the third person masculine and feminine pronouns.

kanten 'singer' kantenpa 'male singer' kantenla 'female singer'

suŋaŋ 'dancer'   suŋsaŋpa 'male dancer'   suŋsaŋla 'female dancer'

Proper nouns in Ao also carry the gender markers -pa and -la.

pentanpa 'Bendangba' (man's name)

cupanunpa 'Chubanungba' (man's name)

With some human nouns the Ao masculine marker is -saŋ not -pa. But the feminine marker is -la.

kiyim 'marriage' kiyimsaŋ 'bridegroom' kiyimla 'bride'

With non-human nouns the masculine and feminine markers are -tepuŋ and -tecu.

ən 'fowl'   əntepuŋ 'cock'   əntecu 'hen'

azu 'dog'   azutepuŋ 'male dog'   azutecu 'bitch'

It may be noted that the masculine marker for 'bull' is -punci not -tepuŋ. This masculine marker is not used with any other word.

nasi 'cattle'   nasipuŋci 'bull'   nasitecu 'cow'

Animateness evokes no grammatical concord within the Ao noun phrase, but with the ablative and locative cases there are two postpositions, one for animate nouns, the other for inanimates.

In Meiteilon there is no gender distinction in the pronouns:

(17) əi 'I'   əikhoi 'we'

nəŋ 'you'   nəkhoi 'you'

məhak 'he,she,it'   məkhoi 'they'

(18) /məhak   isiŋ   yinbana   numit   khudiŋ-gi   iruzəi/

he/she water   cold   everyday   take   bath

(He/She takes a bath with cold water every day)

If there is an adjective in a noun phrase, then gender can be determined for its noun (19-20):

(19) /fəzəbi   məhak   ədu   ləikon-da   ləi hek-li/[3]

beautiful   she   that   garden-in   flower plucking

(She [the beautiful girl] is plucking flowers in

the garden)

(20) /fəzəba   məhak   ədu   ləikon-da   isiŋ   cai-ri/

handsome   he   that   garden-in   water   watering

(He [the handsome boy] is watering in the garden)

Meiteilon thus has grammatical gender limited to adjective-marked agreement with human nouns. Distinction of gender is made by postposed words or suffixes. On the whole, most languages and dialects of the Tibeto-Burman family do not have grammatical gender.

FOOTNOTES

[1] But as personal names we have

θərosəŋbi Tharosangbi (Green Lily),

θəmbalsəŋbi Thambalsangbi (Green Lotus), with the

feminine suffix.

[2] Exception: yenba 'cock', yenbi 'hen'

[3] In Meiteilon, adjectives can qualify pronouns, but the
adjective must precede the pronoun. With nouns, an adjective
usually can either precede or follow the noun, without
semantic change.

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