



**MORPHOLOGY OF THE ADI LANGUAGE  
OF ARUNACHAL PRADESH**

**ABSTRACT**

**SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT  
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Adi is a language spoken by the Adis, one of the largest hill tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. Though they were formerly known as Abors, their tribe name as per the census records is Adi. The Adis are sub-divided into different sub-tribes. Among them are Padam, Minyong, Pangi, Shimong, Ashing, Pasi, Karko, Bokar, Bori, Ramo, Pailibo, Milan, Tangam and Tagin. The Padam and Minyong are the largest groups.

The total population of the Adis according to the 1991 census is 1.2 lakhs, and they constitute the largest tribal group in Arunachal Pradesh. The Adis spread over in the East, West and Upper Siang Districts of Arunachal Pradesh. The Adi-inhabited area is about 21,229 sq. kms. excluding the areas in the Dibang and Subansiri valley.<sup>1</sup>

### **Statement of the Problem**

The proposed study is entitled 'Morphology of the Adi Language of Arunachal Pradesh'

The need for the study arises from the various problems being faced. At the outset, there is no proper linguistic description on the Adi language. The linguistic descriptions done so far are very scanty. Proper morphological descriptions have so far been lacking, although there have been brief attempts.

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<sup>1</sup> Sachin Roy. 1966. *Aspects of Padam – Minyong Culture*. P. 1.

## **Delimitation of the study**

The present study is delimited only to the Adi language as spoken by the Padams (Adi clan name), who inhabit the areas covered by the East Siang and Upper Siang Districts.

The present study is mainly descriptive, not adhering to any conceptual framework. However, it employs certain terms that have been used by various scholars that are found most suitable for describing aspects of the language.

Apart from derivation, word formation processes, like compounding, coining, blending, etc., which happen to be crucial aspects of describing the morphology of any language, are however, not dealt with in this study due to difficulty in eliciting relevant data.

In dealing with certain word classes, it was not completely possible to separate the realm of morphology from that of syntax. This is especially so in the case where there are inflectional-like processes involved. The language is studied both under derivational and inflectional morphology.

With regard to the morphological processes involved, only the nominals and verbals are discussed and that too, only with regard to affixation, modification and reduplication.

## **Objectives of the study**

The objectives of the present study are to describe:

- (a) the basic morphology of the nominals in the Adi Language,
- (b) the basic morphology of the verbals in the Adi Language and
- (c) the morphological processes employed.

## Methodology and Data

The linguistic fieldwork methodology<sup>2</sup> was adopted for this research study. Elicitation of linguistic data was done with the help of informants of various age groups using linguistic field procedures. For the collection of the primary data, the following elicitation methods were employed-

### Observation Method.

This requires fairly good advance knowledge of the language under consideration. While adopting this method, it is assumed that the basic grammar is already known to the fieldworker, yet to refute or validate hypotheses one can adopt this method to collect further evidence....The observation method involves the participation of the field investigator in various social activities of the community. S/he may not play an active part in the day-to-day life; however, s/he will have to engage herself/himself in some social activities of the community life.<sup>3</sup>

Prior to the writing of this dissertation, I had stayed in Pasighat, which is in the East Siang District of Arunachal Pradesh, among the Adi people for a period of three years, during which I took part in various community activities. This experience gave me a fairly good knowledge about the culture, the basic aspects of the Adi language and sufficient time to collect data.

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<sup>2</sup> Anvita Abbi, *A Manual of Linguistic Field Work and Structures of Indian Languages*, Muenchen: Lincom Europa, 2001, p. 84.

<sup>3</sup> Anvita Abbi, *A Manual of Linguistic Field Work and Structures of Indian Languages*, ... p. 84.

### **Documentary Source Method.**

In the absence of real speakers of the language, either because they no longer exist, as the language is extinct, or because they are out of bounds of the investigator, the documentary source method is adopted. One has to rely on published material and make a trip to several places where such material is available.<sup>4</sup>

For writing this dissertation, I have made use of the few books, papers and material available on Adi language and also those that are related to Tibeto-Burman languages of the Northeast India in general.

### **Interview Method.**

This is the most common and widely used method for field investigation, and is strongly recommended. The field investigator can interview informants with or without the help of questionnaires. ...interviews are generally taken directly.<sup>5</sup>

I have, in collecting data for this dissertation, gone to Arunachal during April, 2002 and again in September, 2004. During these two visits, 10 informants were interviewed.

### **Structure of the Thesis**

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<sup>4</sup> Anvita Abbi, *A Manual of Linguistic Field Work and Structures of Indian Languages...*, p. 85.

<sup>5</sup> Anvita Abbi, *A Manual of Linguistic Field Work and Structures of Indian Languages...* p. 84.

In **chapter 1**, short introductions of the language under study, the people who speak it, and the area in which it is spoken is given. It also states the problems this research attempts to deal with.

**Chapter 2** is a survey of literature. Previous works done by scholars on the Adi language is given in brief. Related works of certain scholars are also given.

**Chapter 3** is divided into three sections. The first section is a discussion of the statement of the problems and the delimitation of the study. The second portion is a section on the methods and procedures used for the study. The third section explains terminology used followed by the structure of the thesis.

**Chapter 4** is a brief section on the revision of the phonetics and phonological system of the Adi language. The sounds both of consonants and vowels which Adi makes use of are given with a description of each. The Sandhi or the assimilation processes followed by the language is also discussed.

**Chapter 5** is a section on the morphology of the nominals of the language under study.

The noun phrases form one of the major constituents of Adi sentences. The noun phrases can include several smaller constituents, viz, determiners, demonstratives, nouns, pronouns, numerals, modifying adjectives and case markers. The noun phrase includes a noun, which can be regarded as the "head" of the noun phrase.

In this chapter, the morphology of Adjectives is also dealt with, as they constitute an integral part of the noun phrase.

**Chapter 6** deals with the morphology of the verbs - their construction and combination with other elements in a sentence.

The tense, aspect, moods, and modals systems are discussed. This is followed by the verb construction procedures, which include the complementizer and the causative. Another feature Adi is rich in is the directional verbs. A good portion of this chapter is, therefore, devoted to the directional verbs.

This chapter also deals with the morphology of adverbs as they constitute an integral part of the verb phrase.

In **chapter 7** the morphological processes employed in the Adi language are discussed.

The morphological processes employed are affixation, modification and reduplication. Affixation includes prefixation and suffixation. Modification includes subtraction and suppletion. Finally, reduplication includes partial, complete and discontinuous word reduplication.

Finally, **Chapter 8** is a discussion and conclusion of the preceding chapters.

## ***DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSION***

Adi is generally believed to belong to the Tibeto Burman family of languages. However, there have been differences in the classifications put forward by various scholars. Of the classifications discussed in the first

chapter, that of Tianshin Jackson Sun (1993) seems to be the most appropriate, moreover, Robbins Burling (1999) also evidently shares his views. In view of their discussions, the researcher also considers the classification of the two mentioned scholars, most plausible.

With regard to typology, in Adi, the syllable is a crucial phonological unit, and the syllable initial consonants are larger in number than those of syllable finals. Adi has four nasal consonants *m*, *n*, *ŋ* and *ɲ*, all of which can occur initially, medially or finally. However, unlike most Northeastern Tibeto-Burman languages, aspirated consonants and the glottal stop are absent.

The Adi vowel system consists of fifteen consonants, nine vowels and six diphthongs. Although there are diphthongs, Adi makes very little use of them.

Assimilation is a common feature of the Adi phonology. Assimilation occurs at the morphemic boundaries and not within it. Syllable boundaries correspond to morpheme boundaries. As the combination of a number of morphemes is permissible in a single word, Adi is considered to be an agglutinating language.

The noun phrases form one of the major constituents of Adi sentences. Noun compounding is common and a number of nouns take prefix and suffix-like morphemes. The noun phrases can include several smaller constituents, viz, determiners, demonstratives, nouns, pronouns, numerals, modifying adjectives and case markers. However, no single one of these constituents occurs in every noun phrase. But any one of them except a case

marker can constitute a noun phrase all by itself. Case markers, when present, are always suffixed to the head nouns.

The noun phrase includes a noun, which can be regarded as the “head” of the noun phrase. Nouns can have a variety of suffixes. A ‘noun stem’ is the word to which these noun suffixes can be attached. Three kinds of suffixes can be used with the noun stem: plural markers, case markers and gender markers with –human, + animate nouns.

Unlike other Tibeto-Burman languages in the North East (India), Adi is rich in case markers, although it does not make use of the Ergative-Absolutive case system. Another feature Adi possesses, which is not uncommon to other Tibeto-Burman languages is the presence of noun classifiers. Adi has a number of classifiers, which are discussed in chapter five. Other features that are discussed are the Noun phrase construction, the determiners, the postpositions, the numeral system, the nominalizers, quotative, interrogatives and the pronouns.

Adjectives, in Adi, constitute an integral part of the noun phrase. They occupy modifying slots in the noun phrase and can either precede or follow the noun. Adjectives do not take person, number and gender suffixes. Adjectives in Adi may be predicative or attributive. The difference of forms between the two is achieved by means of affixation.

Adi is a verb final language, which makes use of postpositions. Verbs are studied with respect to their construction and combination with other elements in a sentence. They can be particularly complex, as they take negative and interrogative affixes and other various sorts of adverbial and

tense affixes. These affixes are however, mostly suffixes. Adi verbs do not show any agreement.

The verb in Adi is a morpheme capable of taking tense/aspect markers or the imperative markers. The verbs are not marked for person-number-gender. They are constituents that necessarily take a suffix, i.e., the verb stem cannot exist alone in a meaningful utterance without one or more suffixes.

In the chapter on verbs, i.e., chapter six, the tense, aspect, moods, and modals systems are discussed. This is followed by the verb construction procedures, which include the complementizer and the causative. Another feature Adi is rich in is the verbal directional adverbials. The verbal directional adverbials are morphemes which are suffixed to motion verbs and they specify the manner, direction or other aspects of a verb.

Adverbs constitute an integral part of the verb phrase. Adverbs in Adi may be simple, derived or compounded. Among the adverbs discussed are adverbs of manner, of place, of time, and of purpose. The adverbial clause is formed by means of suffixing an adverbializer to the main verb.

The morphological processes employed are affixation, modification and reduplication. Affixation includes prefixation and suffixation only. Modification includes subtraction and suppletion. Finally, reduplication includes partial, complete and discontinuous word reduplication.

This research is neither an exhaustive survey of the literature of the Adi language, nor an exhaustive description of the morphology of the language. It however, is an attempt to answer some of the questions arising

from the study of the Adi language with regard to its morphology. There is a great scope for studying further, aspects of the morphology of the Adi language which has not been touched upon in this dissertation. Scholars are encouraged to make a careful critical study of it and take, the shortcomings thereof, as a challenge for a more thorough and detailed study in the future.

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