

Nominal Categories in Bishnupriya Manipuri and Manipuri

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The title clearly reflects a comparative focus between Bishnupriya Manipuri (Indo-Aryan) and Manipuri (Tibeto-Burman). It explores typological distinctions between Indo-Aryan and Tibeto-Burman languages, focusing on number, gender, case, and pronoun systems. On the basis of primary field data and secondary sources, the study showed that although the two languages show superficial similarities as a result of prolonged contact, their underlying grammatical organization is remarkably different. The findings show that even in extreme contact zones, core morphosyntactic traits are resistant to contact-induced change. This study contributes to linguistics typology and contact linguistics by highlighting the limits of structural convergence.

Keywords: *Tibeto-Burman, Indo-Aryan, nominal categories, typology, morpho-syntax*

1 Introduction

This paper presents a comparative analysis of nominal categories in Bishnupriya Manipuri and Manipuri, two languages that co-exist geographically but belong to distinct language families—Indo-Aryan and Tibeto-Burman, respectively. While previous studies have described aspects of these languages independently, systematic comparison of their nominal systems remain limited.

Manipuri, also known as Meiteilon, functions as both the lingua franca and the official language of Manipur, and serves as the native language of the Meitei (Meetei) community. From a classificatory perspective, Paul K. Benedict places Manipuri within the Kuki-Naga subgroup of the Tibeto-Burman family, citing its structural similarities with related languages (Benedict 1972: 4-11). In contrast, George A. Grierson identifies Manipuri as an independent member of the Kuki-Chin group within the broader Tibeto-Burman language family (Grierson 1904: 1-5). The language possesses its own indigenous script, Meitei Mayek, and gained official recognition when it was included in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution of India in 1992.

Bishnupriya Manipuri, also referred to simply as Bishnupriya, is the native language of the Bishnupriya community. It is classified within the Indo-Aryan language family, as reflected in the Census of India (2001). Historically, its origins have been linked to the Magadhan region, and it is often described as having developed through contact between Bengali and Meitei, while still preserving certain pre-Bengali linguistic features (Sinha 2017). The language is understood to have emerged in the region of Manipur.

According to the Census of India (2011), Bishnupriya Manipuri has a speaker population of 74,069 in India. Its speakers are distributed not only across parts of northeastern India—particularly Tripura and Assam—but also in Bangladesh. In Assam, significant concentrations are found in the districts of Cachar, Karimganj, and Hailakandi. In Tripura, Bishnupriya-speaking communities are commonly located in areas such as Dharmanagar, Kailashahar, Kamalpur, and West Tripura. Additionally, smaller populations of speakers are present in various parts of Meghalaya

This study is guided by three central research questions:

(1) How Bishnupriya Manipuri and Manipuri differ in their encoding of Number, Gender, and Case.

(2) to what extent these differences reflect genealogical affiliation as opposed to Areal contact.

(3) What these patterns reveal about typological alignment systems in contact zones.

From a typological standpoint, the comparison is particularly noteworthy, as it brings into focus the contrast between a Nominative–Accusative system and an Ergative–Absolutive system, while also considering the potential effects of contact-induced convergence.

The analysis adopts a functional-typological framework, situating the discussion within broader debates on alignment systems and language contact. Previous scholarship has demonstrated that, although lexical borrowing is frequent in contact settings, core morphosyntactic features, such as case alignment and agreement systems, tend to exhibit a high degree of stability (Comrie 1989: 35-45; Dixon 1994: 9-20; Thomason & Kaufman 1988: 14-15, 74-76). In line with these observations, the present study finds that, despite certain surface-level similarities arising from prolonged contact, the two languages remain fundamentally distinct in their underlying grammatical organization, particularly with regard to case marking and pronominal systems.

2 Literature Survey

Previous scholarship highlights the hybrid nature of Bishnupriya Manipuri and the typological distinctiveness of Manipuri. However, systematic comparative analyses of nominal categories remain limited, justifying the present study.

Language plays a crucial role in maintaining the cultural identity and distinctiveness of a community. This is particularly significant for minority groups, where language preservation becomes essential for cultural survival. Bishnupriya Manipuri, recognized by UNESCO as an endangered language, reflects this urgency for preservation.

The structure of Bishnupriya Manipuri reflects features associated with both Indo-Aryan and Tibeto-Burman language groups, indicating a history of sustained contact and interaction. In this regard, Gajarani (2004) observes that the language has been significantly influenced by Sanskrit, Maharashtri, and Sauraseni Prakrit, pointing to its Indo-Aryan heritage while also acknowledging external influences.

Bishnupriya Manipuri is generally classified as an Eastern Indo-Aryan language that has undergone extensive contact with Tibeto-Burman languages, particularly Meitei (Sinha 1981: 12). An early and comprehensive linguistic description is provided by Sinha (1960: 23), who identifies thirty-five phonemes in the language, including twenty-five consonants and eight vowels. His work also examines the phonological influence of Meitei on Bishnupriya Manipuri and offers a detailed account of nominal categories, including gender, number, case marking (including zero marking), pronouns, postpositional constructions, and verbal morphology.

Subsequent research has expanded on these descriptive foundations. Kalita et al. (2013) focus on the development of a Bishnupriya Manipuri corpus, with the aim of facilitating linguistic analysis through digitised textual data. Their findings indicate that gender is expressed through both lexical means (e.g. distinct forms such as *manu* ‘male’ and *jela*

‘female’) and morphological marking. The study also provides a descriptive account of case suffixes and mood markers, highlighting the language’s morphological richness.

More recent work by Thokchom & Chanu (2025) investigates gender distinction in Bishnupriya Manipuri from a morphological perspective. Their analysis shows that the language primarily relies on natural gender, particularly for animate referents, and employs a combination of strategies to mark gender. These include the use of lexical oppositions in kinship terms, the addition of suffixes, and the incorporation of gender-specific descriptive elements. While some nouns are inherently marked for gender, others remain neutral unless specified by contextual or morphological cues.

Research on Manipuri (Meitei), by contrast, has focused on its grammatical structure and categorisation. Purkayastha (2016) provides a computational perspective through part-of-speech tagging, identifying major word classes such as nouns, pronouns, verbs, modifiers, demonstratives, adverbs, particles, numerals, and reduplication, along with their grammatical properties and annotation processes. Similarly, Krishna B et. al (2012) examine nominal categories through the development of a finite-state morphological analyser, offering insights into the structural organisation of Manipuri nominal forms. Indrakumar Singh (2019) further contributes to this area by presenting a descriptive account of nominal morphology in Manipuri, focusing on categories such as gender, number, person, case, and numerals.

Collectively, these studies establish a robust foundation for analysing the nominal systems of both Bishnupriya Manipuri and Manipuri, while also underscoring the significant role of language contact in shaping their structural configurations.

3 Methodology

The data for the present study were drawn from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were collected through fieldwork involving the documentation of basic lexical items and sentences from native speakers of Bishnupriya Manipuri and Manipuri. In order to capture a representative range of linguistic variation, speakers were selected from diverse age groups, social backgrounds, religious communities, and genders. Specifically, informants were drawn from three age groups, namely those above 50 years, those between 20 and 40 years, and those below 20 years, from Singari village in the Cachar district of Assam and from Imphal in Manipur.

Secondary data were obtained through a careful review of existing literature and archival materials. Sources such as the Census of India, the Linguistic Survey of India, and Benedict’s *Sino-Tibetan: A Conspectus* were consulted to provide historical and typological background on the languages under study. Nevertheless, greater emphasis was placed on primary data, particularly the spoken varieties, in order to reflect current linguistic usage.

Both direct and indirect methods of data collection were employed. The primary dataset included a range of verbal materials, such as narratives, proverbs, folktales, songs, and recorded conversations, which were preserved for further analysis. In addition, written texts and manuscripts were examined, and interviews were conducted to supplement the data. The analysis followed a qualitative approach, with secondary sources used to cross-check and validate the findings against contemporary language use.

4 Nominal Categories in Bishnupriya Manipuri and Manipuri

The term *noun classification* refers specifically to systems that involve the categorisation of nouns as linguistic forms, based on their morphological or phonological properties (Kilarski 2013: 1). Some of the morphosyntactic features of the languages under study are outlined below.

The Nouns of both the languages are inflected for number, case and gender. The instances are provided below:

4.1 Numbers

In linguistics, 'number' constitutes a core grammatical category that systematically encodes distinctions of quantity—most commonly singular and plural, and in certain languages, additional categories such as dual or trial through inflectional morphology and syntactic agreement across nouns, pronouns, adjectives, and verbs. It functions at the interface of semantics and morphosyntax, representing the cardinality of referents or events (e.g., 'dogs' vs. 'dogs') while contributing to the grammatical expression of individuation, plurality, and numerical reference within a language system.

4.1.1 Number in Bishnupriya Manipuri

Bishnupriya Manipuri exhibits a two-way number distinction, namely singular and plural. Plurality is primarily marked through suffixation, with forms such as *-gi* (as illustrated in examples (1) and *-lokei* as in examples (2)). In addition to morphological marking, plurality may also be expressed lexically through quantifiers such as *mahi* and *hani*, as demonstrated in examples (3) and (4).

Plural suffix */-gi/*

(1)	Singular	Plural
a.	<i>manu</i> man 'man'	<i>manu-gi</i> man-PL 'people'
b.	<i>kukur</i> dog 'dog'	<i>kukur-gi</i> dog-PL 'dogs'
c.	<i>muni</i> boy 'boy'	<i>muni-gi</i> boy-PL 'boys'

Plural Suffix */-lokei/*

(2)	Singular	Plural
a.	<i>bejok</i> brother-SG 'brother'	<i>bejok-lokei</i> brother-PL 'group of brothers'
b.	<i>mami</i>	<i>mami-nok-lokei</i>

aunty-SG 'aunty'	aunty- F- PL 'group of aunties'
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Quantifier /hani/

(3)	Singular	Plural
a.	<i>p^ham</i> bed 'bed'	<i>p^ham hani</i> bed QUANT 'some beds'
b.	<i>rupa</i> money 'money'	<i>rupa hani</i> money QUANT 'some money'

Quantifier /mahi/

(4)	Singular	Plural
a.	kolom pen 'pen'	kolom mahi pen QUANT 'many pens'
b.	pahija bird 'bird'	pahija mahi bird QUANT 'many birds'

Numerals

(5)	Singular	Plural
a.	<i>niɲol</i> girl 'girl'	<i>niɲol ʃfairi-go</i> girl four-CLF 'four girls'
b.	<i>atti</i> elephant 'elephant'	<i>atti noi-go</i> elephant nine-CLF 'nine elephants'

4.1.2 *Number in Manipuri*

Manipuri exhibits a relatively limited set of plural markers, primarily employing the suffixes *-siŋ* and *-k^hoi*. These suffixes function in distinct grammatical contexts. The suffix *-siŋ* is typically used with common nouns to indicate plurality, whereas *-k^hoi* is restricted in its distribution, occurring mainly with pronominal forms and proper nouns. This distinction reflects a functional differentiation in the plural marking system of the language.

Plural Suffix /siŋ/

(6)	Singular	Plural
a.	<i>nupa</i> man	<i>nupa-siŋ</i> man-PL

	man	‘men’
b.	<i>aŋaŋ</i> child ‘child’	<i>aŋaŋ-siŋ</i> child-two ‘children’

Plural Suffix /*kʰoi*/

(7)	Singular	Plural
a.	<i>naŋ</i> 2SG ‘you’	<i>na-kʰoi</i> 2SG-PL ‘you’
b.	<i>ma</i> 3SG ‘he/she’	<i>ma-kʰoi</i> 3SG-PL ‘they’

Plural Suffix /-*kʰoi*/

(8)	Singular	Plural
a.	<i>nupa</i> man ‘man’	<i>nupa-siŋ</i> man-PL ‘men’
b.	<i>aŋaŋ</i> child ‘child’	<i>aŋaŋ-siŋ</i> child-PL ‘children’

In example 8 (a), assimilation occurs due to the co-articulation of the final segments /*ŋ*/ and /*kʰ*/, both of which are articulated at the velar place of articulation. This shared phonetic environment facilitates the assimilatory process.

Quantifier /*majam*/

(9)	Singular	Plural
a.	<i>aŋaŋ</i> child ‘child’	<i>aŋaŋ majam</i> child QUANT ‘lots of children’
b.	<i>mi</i> person ‘person’	<i>mi jam (mi + majam)</i> person QUANT ‘a crowd of people’

In example (8a), the segments /*ŋ*/ (a velar nasal) and /*m*/ (a bilabial nasal) occur in sequence; however, nasal place assimilation does not apply in this context. The phonological system of the language constrains such processes, preventing the nasal from altering its place of articulation to conform to the following consonant, and vice versa. This indicates a restriction on place assimilation across differing nasal articulations.

Example (8b) */mijam/* represents a compound form composed of two underlying lexemes: */mi/* ‘human’ and */majam/* ‘plural marker’. In the process of compounding, the initial syllable of the plural morpheme is elided. This reduction can be attributed to the tendency of homorganic sounds to co-occur and facilitate phonological simplification.

As a result, the derived form, */mijam/* exhibits a restructured syllabic pattern. The penultimate syllable remains open, with the vowel */i/* functioning as its nucleus, while the following syllable begins with the semivowel */j/* in the onset position. This reflects an interaction between morphological combination and phonological constraints in shaping the surface form.

Numerals¹

(10)	Singular	Plural
a.	<i>nupa</i> man-SG ‘a man’	<i>nupa-əni</i> man-two ‘two men’
b.	<i>aŋaŋ</i> child-SG ‘a child’	<i>aŋaŋ-əni</i> child-two ‘two children’

4.2 Gender

The term "gender" in linguistics describes a grammatical system that uses pronouns and adjectives that agree with nouns to classify them as masculine, feminine, or neuter. The relationship between numerous grammatical gender systems and biological sex, as well as other categories like size that support certain gender systems and have external correlates, are the earliest clear examples of its connections to the real world. While gender assignment to nouns is semantically apparent in many languages, it is opaquer in others.

4.2.1 Gender in Bishnupriya Manipuri

Bishnupriya Manipuri marks gender primarily through lexical and morphological means, rather than through a highly elaborated grammatical gender system. Gender distinctions are expressed through three main strategies: the use of contrasting lexical items in kinship terms, the inclusion of gender-specific descriptive modifiers for humans and animals, and the addition of suffixes such as *-i*, *-ni*, and *-nok*.

Certain nouns are inherently specified for gender and do not permit alternation—for instance, */lerikula/* ‘storyteller’, which is restricted to masculine reference—while others remain gender-neutral unless further specified by contextual or morphological cues. In addition, the language employs qualifying forms such as */muni/* and */jela/*, which may occur alongside a noun (either preceding or following it) to indicate masculine and feminine reference respectively, for both human and non-human entities.

¹ Numerals may also function to express number, as is commonly observed in other Tibeto-Burman languages. In this language, however, numerals and plural markers are in complementary distribution and do not co-occur within the same syntactic environment. This restriction reflects a constraint in the grammatical encoding of number, whereby plurality is expressed either lexically through numerals or morphologically through plural marking, but not both simultaneously.

Kalita et al. (2013) further note that feminine forms can be derived morphologically through the addition of suffixes such as *-i*, *-ani*, and *-ni* to masculine bases. Overall, the system reflects a flexible interaction between lexical choice and morphological marking in the expression of gender.

Gender Term ‘*muni*’ and ‘*jela*’

- (10)
- | | |
|----|---|
| a. | <i>hoba muni-daktar-go</i>
good male- doctor-CLF
‘A good male doctor’ |
| b. | <i>muni sau-go</i>
male child-CLF
‘A boy’ |
| c. | <i>hoba jela sau-go</i>
good female child-CLF
‘A good girl’ |
| d. | <i>sik^hito jela-go</i>
educated female-CLF
‘An educated teacher’ |

Gender Affix /-nok/

Both the younger and older relationships on the maternal side might have the suffix *-nok* added to them to mark feminine gender. However, it can only be utilized to mark feminine gender with the elder one on the paternal side. For instance:

- (11)
- | | | |
|----|---|--|
| a. | Masculine
<i>mamak</i>
‘paternal uncle’ | Feminine
<i>maminok</i>
‘paternal aunty’ |
| b. | <i>baginak</i>
‘cousin brother’ | <i>baginok</i>
‘cousin sister’ |

Gender Affix /i/ or /-ni/

- (12)
- | | | |
|----|--|--|
| a. | Masculine
<i>ƒamar</i>
cobbler
‘male cobbler’ | Feminine
<i>ƒamar-ni</i>
cobbler-F
‘female cobbler’ |
| b. | <i>mekur</i>
cat
‘he-cat’ | <i>mekur-i</i>
cat-F
‘she-cat’ |

Pair terms

- (13)
- | | | |
|--|-----------|----------|
| | Masculine | Feminine |
|--|-----------|----------|

- | | | |
|----|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| a. | <i>bejak</i>
'brother' | <i>benok</i>
'sister' |
| b. | <i>ima</i>
'mother' | <i>baba</i>
'father' |

Adjectives

Gender is marked by a limited set of adjectives that suggest age differences; these adjectives are only used with animate nouns, as in 14 (a) and (b).

(14)		Masculine	Feminine
	a.	<i>jet^ha muni-go</i> elder male-CLF 'elder male'	<i>jet^hi niŋol-go</i> elder female-CLF 'elder female'
	b.	<i>k^hula muni sau-go</i> younger male child-CLF 'younger male'	<i>k^huli niŋol sau-go</i> younger girl child-CLF 'younger female'

4.2.2 Gender in Manipuri

There is no grammatical gender system in Manipuri. The language has natural gender like other Tibeto-Burman languages such as Anal, Zeme, Koirang, Paite, and Thadou. The three primary ways that a gender distinction is expressed are through the use of opposing words in kinship phrases, gender-specific descriptive adjectives for people, animals, and birds, and suffixes (-*pi/pa*) or (-*bi/-ba*). Some nouns are inherently masculine or feminine and cannot be changed, e.g. /*u su-ba*/ 'carpenter' (masculine) and /*jum sa-ba*/ 'builder' (masculine).

Gender Term /*labə*/ and /*əmom*/

(15)	a.	<i>hui labə</i>	<i>əma</i>	<i>k^hoŋ-li</i>	
		dog male	one	bark-SIM.ASP	
		'A he-dog barks'			
	b.	<i>hui əmom</i>	<i>əma</i>	<i>k^hoŋ-li</i>	
		dog male	one	bark-SIM.ASP	
		'A he-dog barks'			
	c.	<i>*nupi</i>	<i>əmom</i>	<i>əma</i>	<i>k^hoŋ-li</i>
		Woman	female one	bark-	SIM.ASP
		'A woman barks'			

From the above example the study has concluded that the gender term /*labə*/ and /*əmom*/ can only be used with non-human nouns.

Gender affix /-*pi~pa*/ or /-*bi~ba*/

(16)		Masculine	Feminine
	a.	<i>isəi-sək-pa</i> song-sing-M 'male singer'	<i>isəi-sək-pi</i> song-sing-F 'female singer'
	b.	<i>hənu-ba</i> old-M 'old man'	<i>hənu-bi</i> old-F 'old woman'

Pair Terms

(17)		Masculine	Feminine
	a.	<i>pak^haŋ</i> 'bachelor'	<i>ləisabi</i> 'maiden'
	b.	<i>piba</i>	<i>niŋol</i>

‘son’

‘daughter’

4.3 Case

Within the generative framework developed by Chomsky, particularly in Government and Binding theory and the subsequent Minimalist Program, Case (often capitalized to distinguish it from morphological case) is analysed as an abstract grammatical feature that plays a crucial role in licensing noun phrases or determiner phrases within syntactic structure. Rather than being limited to a surface morphological marker, Case is understood as a structural requirement that ensures noun phrases are properly integrated into a sentence (Chomsky 1981: 170, Chomsky 1995: 110–115).

According to Case Theory, every overt noun phrase must receive or check an appropriate Case feature in order to be syntactically well formed and interpretable at the interfaces of grammar. If a noun phrase is not assigned Case, the derivation fails, resulting in ungrammaticality. In this way, Case functions as a fundamental constraint on syntactic representation, linking structural position with grammatical legitimacy (Chomsky 1981: 49–50, Chomsky 1995: 111–113).

The following section examines the case systems of two languages belonging to the Indo-Aryan languages and Tibeto-Burman languages families in order to explore their similarities and differences.

4.3.1 Case in Manipuri

Manipuri has Ergative-Absolutive pattern.

Ergative: It describes a grammatical pattern where the subject of an intransitive clause is handled differently from an intransitive subject and similarly to the object of a transitive phrase. (Dixon 1994:6)

(18) *tombə-ø* *cət-k^hre*
Tomba-ABS go-PRF.ASP
‘Tomba went’

(19) *məjtəj -ø* *tombə -ø* *p^hu-i*
Chaoba-ERG Meitei-ABS beat-SIM.ASP
‘Meitei beats Tomba’

The subject (S) ‘Tomba’ of intransitive verb in example (18) receives the same morphological treatment as the object (O) ‘tombə’ of transitive verb in example (19).

Suffix *-nə*

The suffix *-nə* occur with the subject of intransitive verbs.
For instance:

(20) a. *cəwbə-nə* *hei-du* *ca-k^hre*
Chaoba-CONT fruit-DET eat-PRF.ASP
‘It’s none other than Tomba who ate the fruit’
b. *aŋaŋ-nə* *kəp-k^hi*
child-CONT cry-PRF.ASP
‘It was none other than the child who cried’

The suffix *-nə* indicates contrastive values in the above sentences. (Chelliah 1997: 67).

The above two Sentences show that the actor is sole individual in the group who perform the act indicated by the full verbal predicate. Therefore suffix *-nə* in the above sentences is not a case marker. Hence, the subject of intransitive verb remains unmarked for case.

Suffix *-bu~pu*

The suffix *bu~pu* is not a case marker. Hence, the object of transitive verb remains unmarked for case receiving the same treatment as the subject of intransitive verb in sentence. Instances are given below:

- (21) a. *cawbə-nə tomba-bu ta-tʰi*
Chaoba-ERG Tomba-ADVS ill-treat-SIM.ASP
‘Chaoba beats (particularly) Tomba’
- b. *ləirik-pu segəi-je*
book-ADVS tear-PRF.ASP
‘He/she tears the book’ (contrary to expectation)

- Instrumental Case

In Manipuri, the instrumental case is additionally marked by the suffix *-nə*, which functions to indicate the means or instrument associated with an action. For instance:

- (22) a. *tombə-nə caobə-(bu) tʰaŋ-nə tʰil-li*
Tomba-ERG Chaoba-ACC knife-INS stab-PROG.ASP
‘Tomba stabs Chaoba with a knife’
- b. *u ədu horəi-nə lel-li*
tree det saw-INS cut-PROG.ASP
‘The tree was cut by a saw’
- b. *hei ədu tʰaŋ-nə kʰə-i*
fruit DET knife-INS cut-PROG.ASP
‘The fruits are cut with a Knife’

- Genitive case

The language marks a noun or pronoun with the genitive case marker to indicate the possessor of the referent of another noun or to express an associative relation between the marked noun or pronoun and another noun or pronoun.

The suffix *-gi~ki* is used in Manipuri to signal genitive case, ‘*tombə-gi*’ (Tomba’s), ‘*məhak-ki*’ (his/her).

To indicate possessor

- (23) a. *əy-gi hui*
1SG-GEN dog
‘My dog’
- b. *tombə-gi pʰurit*

Tomba-GEN shirt
 ‘Tomba’s shirt’

To indicate associative relation

- (24) a. *jum-gi* *məniŋ*
 house-GEN back
 ‘the back of the house’
 b. *tʰəmoi-gi* *kacɪn*
 heart-GEN corner
 ‘in a corner of heart’

- Associative Case

The associativity is shown by suffixing a bound morpheme *-gə~kə*, ‘*caoba-gə*’ (with *chaoba*) ‘*məhak-kə*’ (with him/her) in Manipuri.

- (25) a. *əy-ø* *tombə-gə* *cət-li*
 1SG-ERG Tomba-ASS go-PROG.ASP
 ‘I go with Tomba’
 b. *cawba-gə* *mani-gə* *lak-le*
 Chaoba-ASS Mani-ASS come-PRF.ASP
 ‘Chaoba and Mani came’

- Locative Case

The suffix *-də~tə* is used to signal the locative case in Manipuri. For instance:

- (26) a. *.əy-ø* *iskul-də* *cət-li*
 1SG-ERG School-LOC go-PROG.ASP
 ‘I go to school’
 b. *tombə-ø* *pʰəmuŋ-matʰak-ta* *pʰəm-e*
 Tomba-ERG bed- POST-LOC sit-SIM.ASP
 ‘Tomba sits on the bed’

- Ablative Case

The suffix *-dəgi~təgi* is used as ablative in Manipuri. For instance:

- (27) a. *nəŋ-gi* *siŋjəŋ-dəgi* *əe-gi* *jopək-nə* *hennə* *pʰe-i*
 2SG-GEN axe-ABL 1SG-ACC shovel-NMmuch good-SIM.ASP
 ‘My shovel is better than your axe’
 b. *tʰoibə-dəgi* *məhak-ki* *wari* *pumbə* *kʰəŋ-le*
 Thoiba-ABL 3SG-GEN story all know-ASP
 ‘I have known the story about him/her from Thoiba’

4.3.2 *Case in Bishnupriya Manipuri*

Bishnupriya Manipuri inflects nouns for seven cases. In contrast to Manipuri, Bishnupriya Manipuri features a Nominative-Accusative case structure.

- Nominative Case

The suffixes /-j/ and /-e ~ i/ are used to mark the nominative case in Bishnupriya Manipuri. They are attached only to a Noun (+human) but not found in Noun (-human). However, the pronoun and the subject of the intransitive verb are not overtly marked with the nominative case marker in the language. For instance:

- (28)
- | | | | | | |
|----|--------------------------|-----------------|------------------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| a. | <i>caoba-i</i> | | <i>lerik</i> | <i>ahan</i> | <i>pako-er</i> |
| | Chaoba NOM | | book | one | read-PRS.IPFV |
| | ‘Chaoba reads a book’ | | | | |
| b. | <i>soma-i</i> | | <i>bat radi-r-i</i> | | |
| | Soma-NOM | | rice cook-PRS-IPFV. 3F | | |
| | ‘Soma cooks food’ | | | | |
| c. | <i>ram-e</i> | | <i>lerik</i> | <i>ahan</i> | <i>pakor-er</i> |
| | Ram NOM | | book | one | read-PRS.IPFV |
| | ‘Ram reads a book’ | | | | |
| d. | <i>kim-e</i> | <i>caoba-re</i> | | <i>kila-r</i> | |
| | Kim-NOM | chaoba-ACC | | beat-PRS.IPFV | |
| | ‘Kim beats Chaoba’ | | | | |
| e. | <i>rani-j</i> | <i>ela</i> | <i>ahan</i> | <i>di-r-i</i> | |
| | Rani-NOM | song | one | give-PRS.IPFV-3F | |
| | ‘Rani is singing a song’ | | | | |
| f. | <i>joni -j</i> | | <i>pani</i> | <i>pi-ri</i> | |
| | joni-NOM | | water | drink-PRS.IPFV-3F | |
| | ‘Joni drinks water’ | | | | |
| g. | <i>cawba gundz-er</i> | | | | |
| | Chaoba-NOM | | | sleep-PRS-IPFV | |
| | ‘Chaoba is sleeping’ | | | | |
| h. | <i>ta</i> | <i>upeit</i> | <i>ji-toi-ga</i> | | |
| | he | there | go-FUT-NMLZ | | |
| | ‘He will go there’ | | | | |
-
- | | | | | |
|----|------------------|--------------|-------------|-----------------|
| a. | * <i>caoba-j</i> | <i>lerik</i> | <i>ahan</i> | <i>pakor-er</i> |
| b. | * <i>rita-e</i> | <i>lerik</i> | <i>ahan</i> | <i>pakoriri</i> |
| c. | * <i>ram-i</i> | <i>lerik</i> | <i>ahan</i> | <i>pakor-er</i> |

The above examples illustrate that the nominative case agrees with gender in Bishnupriya Manipuri. The nominative suffix /-i/ is used with the proper noun which ends with the vowel /a/. The nominative suffix /-e/ is used with the proper noun which ends with consonants. And the nominative suffix /-j/ is used specifically with the proper noun which ends with a consonant /i/. The subject of example 1 (g) is not marked as the verb is intransitive.

Note: Nominative case is not overtly assigned to the personal pronouns of the language. For instance: *ta merik ahan pakorer* (he reads a book).

Nominative case marker as focus marker (Dual role of nominative case marker in Bishnupriya Manipuri)

The nominative case is not obligatory in the language. However, it becomes mandatory if the emphasize or more focus is given to the subject (agent) of the verb. For instance:

- (29) a. *rita-∅* *tanu-re* *bazar-e* *dek^h-l-i*
rita-null case them-Acc bazaar-LOC see-PST.3F
‘Rita saw them in the bazaar’
b. *ram-e sou-go* *dek^h-l-o*
ram-NOM child-CLF saw-PST.3M
‘It was none other than ram who saw the child’

- Accusative Case

The suffix *-re* is used to mark accusative marker in Bishnupriya Manipuri.
For instance:

- (30) a. *ta* *ama-re* *bara-r*
He 1PL-ACC beat-PRS
‘He beats us’
b. *ram-e* *akaf-re* *bara-r*
Ram-NOM Akash-ACC beat-PRS
‘Ram beats Akash’

- Instrumental Case

Bishnupriya Manipuri uses a suffix *-lo* to signal instrumental case. For instance:

- (31) a. *mi* *caku-han-lo* *p^hol-go* *kap-l-u*
I Knife-DET-INS fruit-DET cut-PST-1SG
‘I cut the fruit with a knife’
b. *ami* *hil-lo* *mandir-go* *hoŋ-kor-l-aŋ*
we stone-INS temple-CLF build-do-PST-3PL
‘We build the temple with stone’
c. *mi* *mekur-go-re* *barigol-lo* *bare-l-u*
I dog-CLF-ACC stick-INS beat-PST-1SG
‘I beat the dog with a stick’

- Genitive Case

In Bishnupriya Manipuri, a suffix *-r* is used to signal genitive case, *rani-r* ‘Rani’s’, *tei-r* ‘his’. Similar to Manipuri, the genitive marker is employed to denote both the associative relationship and the possession.

To indicate possessor

- (32) a. *kukur-go-r* *les-go*
Dog-CLF-GEN tail-CLF
‘The dog’s tail’
b. *tei-r* *malok*

3SG-GEN mother
'Her mother'

To indicate associative relation

- (33) a. *sorkar-go-r* *sompat*
government-CLF-GEN property
‘Government’s property’
- b. *prinsipl-go-r* *kut^ha-go*
principal-CLF-GEN room-CLF
‘principal’s room’

The above examples show that Bishnupriya Manipuri inserts a classifier *-go* while attaching genitive case marker to the (–human) noun.

- Associative Case

In contrast to Manipuri, Bishnupriya Manipuri indicates associativity by using the independent word "*loge*" (with), which comes right before the verb. For instance:

- (34) *mi tar* *loge* *ahe-s-il-u*
1 him ASS come-PRF-PST.1SG
‘I came with him’

- Locative Case

In Bishnupriya Manipuri, the suffix *-e* is used to signal locative case.

- (35) a. *tanu ama-r gor-e ai-la*
they 1PL-GEN house-LOC come-PST.3.PL
‘They come to our house’
- b. *rita-i tanu-re bazar-e dehe-s-il-i*
Rita-NOM 3PL-ACC bazaar-LOC see-PRF-PST-3F
‘Rita saw them in the bazaar’

- Ablative Case

A word that signifies separation takes the ablative case. The suffix *-to* is used as ablative in Bishnupriya Manipuri.

- (36) a. *mi tor jari-hana-to hai jari-han harpe-l-u*
I you word-CLF -ABL fact word-CL know-PST-1SG
‘I have known the truth from your word’
- b. *banglades indija-to 1971 alade os-e*
Bangladesh india-ABL 1971 separate become-PST
‘Bangladesh was separated from India in 1971’

4.4 Post-Position in Manipuri and Bishnupriya Manipuri

Both Bishnupriya Manipuri and Manipuri make extensive use of postpositions in their grammatical structure.

In Manipuri, verbal objects may simultaneously bear case-marking suffixes alongside overt postpositions, indicating a layering of morphological and syntactic marking within the case system.

- (37) a. *tebəl* *mat^hək-tə*
table POST-LOC
‘on the table’
- b. *u* *mak^hə-də*
tree POST-LOC
‘under the tree’

Bishnupriya Manipuri has overt postpositions. Unlike Manipuri, the object does not bear any case marking suffix. For instance:

- (38) a. *gas-jarir pit^hit*
tree-DET POST
‘behind that tree’
- b. *clas-hanor* *bitore*
class-POSS. POST
‘inside the class’

4.4.1 *Uses of post-position at the sentence level in Manipuri*

At the sentence level, post-positions in Manipuri function as key grammatical devices that encode spatial relations, locative reference, and broader syntactic relations among constituents. In contrast to English prepositions, which precede their complements, Manipuri post-positions follow the noun phrase and frequently co-occur with case markers to yield semantically precise locative expressions such as ‘on’, ‘in’, ‘under’, and ‘inside’. From a structural perspective, these forms are not merely adjunct elements but are integral to clause organization, as they contribute to the explicit marking of relational meaning. Consequently, post-positional constructions play a central role in disambiguating argument structure and in establishing clear semantic and syntactic relationships within the sentence. For instance:

- (39) a. *hui-ado* *tebəl* *mat^hək-tə* *lei*
dog-DET table POST-LOC has-SIM.ASP
‘The dog is on the table’
- b. *ŋə* *əmə* *cəp^hu* *manuŋ-də* *lei*
fish one pitcher POST-LOC has-SIM.ASP
‘A fish is in the pitcher’

4.4.2 *Uses of post-position at the sentence level in Bishnupriya Manipuri*

In comparison with Manipuri, post-positional constructions in Bishnupriya Manipuri show both structural similarities and typological distinctions shaped by their different genealogical origins. Bishnupriya Manipuri tends to integrate post-positions more closely with nominal morphology, often in conjunction with possessive or classifier markers, thereby encoding locative relations within a more compact morphological structure. In contrast, Manipuri

(Meitei) typically employs post-positions alongside overt locative case markers, resulting in a comparatively more analytic pattern.

- (40) a. *lerik-han tebul hanor goje-as-e*
book-CL table POSS POST-IPFV-PRS-3p
'The book is on the table'
- b. *p^hol-go polit^hin-go bitor-as-e*
fruit-CL plasticbag-CLF POST-IPF-PRS.3P
'The fruit is in the plastic bag'

4.5 Pronouns in Bishnupriya Manipuri and Manipuri

The pronominal inventory of each language comprises of personal pronouns, relative pronouns, demonstrative pronouns, reflexive pronouns and interrogative pronouns. Some of these pronouns are discussed below.

4.5.1 Personal Pronouns

The personal pronouns of Bishnupriya Manipuri and Manipuri are given below in Table 1.

Table 1: Personal pronouns of Bishnupriya Manipuri and Manipuri

Bishnupriya Manipur					Manipuri					
Pers on	No m	Acc	Dat	Gen	NO M	Acc	Dat	Gen	Dual	Hono rific
1SG	<i>mi</i>	<i>more</i>	<i>more</i>	<i>mor</i>	<i>əy</i>	<i>əy-bu</i>	<i>əyŋon- da</i>	<i>əy-gi</i>	<i>eban-ni</i>	–
2SG	<i>ti</i>	<i>tore</i>	<i>tore</i>	<i>tor</i>	<i>naŋ</i>	<i>naŋ-bu</i>	<i>naŋ- ŋon-da</i>	<i>naŋ-gi</i>	<i>naba-ni</i>	-
3SG	<i>tei/t a</i>	<i>tare/ teire</i>	<i>tare/ teire</i>	<i>tar/tei r</i>	<i>mah ak</i>	<i>mahak- pu</i>	<i>maŋon- da</i>	<i>mahak- ki</i>	<i>maba- ni</i>	<i>ədom- gi/so m- gi</i>
1PL	<i>ami</i>	<i>amare</i>	<i>ama re</i>	<i>amar</i>	<i>əy- k^hoi</i>	<i>əy-k^hoi- bu</i>	<i>əy-ŋon- da</i>	<i>əy-k^hoi- gi</i>	<i>əy-k^hoi- ni</i>	
2PL	<i>tumi</i>	<i>tumar e</i>	<i>tanu re</i>	<i>tumar</i>	<i>nak^h oi</i>	<i>nak^hoi- bu</i>	<i>nak^hoi- da</i>	<i>nak^hoi- gi</i>	<i>nak^hoi- ni</i>	
3PL	<i>tanu</i>	<i>tanure</i>		<i>tanur</i>	<i>mak^h oi</i>	<i>mak^hoi- bu</i>	<i>mak^hoi- da</i>	<i>mak^hoi- gi</i>	<i>mak^hoi- ni</i>	

4.5.2 Demonstrative Pronouns

The demonstrative pronoun in Bishnupriya Manipuri language is used with the classifiers *ta*, *go*, *han/ ago* (this), *outa* (these), *ougo* (that), *outa* (that).

The demonstrative pronoun in the Manipuri language is *masi* (this), *mak^hoi siŋ* (these), *madu* (that), *madu-sinŋ* (those). The plural suffix 'siŋ' is attached to the root in order to make the plural demonstrative pronoun.

4.5.3 Relative Pronoun

In Bishnupriya Manipuri, we find both participial relative clauses and relative pronoun *je*, *jego*, *jehan*, *jeta* and correlative *o*, *ou*, *ogo*, *ohān*.

- (41) a. *mala oiltai ou niḡol ugo jegot jari mi dou-ri-ta*
Mala DET REL girl that whom word 1 talk-PST.IPFV-CLF
‘Mala is the girl whom I was talking about’
b. *ti jeta manouri misti uta ahul-de*
2 REL like sweet those take-PERM
‘You can take whichever sweet you like’

In Manipuri, the relative clause can be created by either utilising the quotative *-haibə*" or nominalising the sentence's verb. These clauses alter a head noun and frequently come before it, much like adjectives. Manipuri employs a process of nominalisation to form the subordinate clause rather than using a relative pronoun like "who" or "that" as some other languages do.

- (42) *əi-nə haiba nupa ədu cawba asi-ni*
1-ERG say man that chaoba this-COP
‘Chaoba is the boy whom I was talking about’

4.5.4 Interrogative pronouns

The interrogative pronouns formed with the help of classifiers show animacy distinctions in Bishnupriya Manipuri as ‘*kungo*’ ‘who’ denotes an ‘animate’ and ‘*kihān*’, ‘*kitā*’ ‘what’ refer to ‘inanimate’. Manipuri also has interrogative pronouns. However, unlike Bishnupriya Manipuri, it does not use any classifiers while forming interrogative pronouns. The personal pronouns of Bishnupriya Manipuri and Manipuri are given below:

Table 2: Interrogative Pronoun in Bishnupriya Manipuri and Manipuri

Pronoun	Bishnupriya Manipuri	Manipuri
who	<i>kungo</i>	<i>kəna</i>
what	<i>kihān/ kitā</i>	<i>kəri</i>
which	<i>kun</i>	<i>kərəmbə</i>
how much	<i>koti</i>	<i>kəjam</i>
how	<i>kisade</i>	<i>kəmdouna</i>
when	<i>kundin</i>	<i>kərəmbə mətəm-da</i>
where	<i>kumpei</i>	<i>kədaida</i>
why	<i>kitaja</i>	<i>kəriḡi</i>

5 Discussion

The comparative analysis indicates that the differences between Bishnupriya Manipuri and Manipuri are rooted in deeper typological distinctions rather than merely superficial variation. Bishnupriya Manipuri displays features characteristic of Indo-Aryan languages, including a Nominative–Accusative alignment and a more elaborated system of number and honorific distinctions, whereas Manipuri aligns more closely with typological patterns associated with Tibeto-Burman languages.

Despite extended geographical proximity and sustained sociolinguistic interaction, the two languages exhibit minimal structural convergence. Although lexical borrowing and the adoption of quantifier-based plural marking indicate some level of contact influence, fundamental grammatical domains—such as case marking and pronominal systems—remain largely unaffected. This pattern reinforces the widely accepted view that morphosyntactic alignment is comparatively resistant to contact-induced change, especially when contrasted with the greater susceptibility of the lexicon.

Moreover, the use of dual number and honorific distinctions in Manipuri points to a degree of grammatical elaboration that is not paralleled in Bishnupriya Manipuri. This imbalance indicates that language contact does not inevitably result in structural simplification or levelling; rather, it can allow distinct typological features to persist, maintaining differences between the languages.

This observation aligns with typological accounts of alignment systems (Dixon, 1994:6; Bernard Comrie 1989:125) and research on language contact (Thomason and Kaufman 1988:74), all of which emphasize the relative stability of core grammatical features. The present data therefore contribute to ongoing discussions about the limits of structural convergence in situations of sustained language contact.

6 Conclusion

This study offers a typological comparison of nominal categories in Bishnupriya Manipuri and Manipuri, showing that, despite prolonged contact, the two languages remain fundamentally distinct in their grammatical organisation. Bishnupriya Manipuri follows typical Indo-Aryan patterns, characterised by nominative–accusative alignment and a comparatively less complex nominal system. In contrast, Manipuri displays key Tibeto-Burman features, including ergative–absolutive alignment, a three-way number distinction, and a more elaborated honorific system.

The findings suggest that although language contact can give rise to similarities at the surface level, underlying morphosyntactic structures tend to remain relatively stable and resistant to change. This reinforces the distinction in contact linguistics between superficial convergence and the persistence of deeper structural properties.

By situating the analysis within a typological framework, this study contributes our understanding of how languages in contact can preserve their structural identities while simultaneously sharing lexical and functional features. It highlights the dynamic balance between stability and interaction in multilingual settings. Future research could extend this comparison to the domain of verbal morphology and examine diachronic developments in greater depth, thereby offering a more comprehensive account of language change and contact-induced variation.

Abbreviations

- 1-First Person
- 2-Second Person
- 3-Third Person
- SG-Singular
- PL-Plural

CLF-Classifier
M-Masculine
F-Feminine
SIM-Simple
ASP-Aspect
PERF-Perfect
INS-Instrumental
ERG-Ergative
ADVS-Adversative
GEN-Genitive
PROG-Progressive
ASS-Associative
PRF-Perfect
POST- post-position
ACC-Accusative
ABL-Ablative
PRS-Present
PST-Past
DET-Determiner
NOM-Nominative
IPFV-Imperfective
FUT-Future
NMLZ-Nominalizer
PST-Past
LOC-Locative
CONT-Contrastive
POSS-Possessive
REL-Relative

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