ABSTRACT

A DESCRIPTIVE GRAMMAR OF ZEME

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By

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Abstract

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The present work entitled “A Descriptive Grammar of Zeme” is the descriptive study of Zeme language spoken in Tousem sub-division of Tamenglong district of Manipur. It is one of the thirty four (34) recognized scheduled tribes of Manipur including recently recognized three scheduled tribes namely Paomei, Tarao, Kharam (Manipur Gazette, 2003). Zeme is one of the sub-tribes of Zeliangrong. Zeme belongs to the Kuki-Chin-Naga group of the Tibeto-Burman family of languages (Bradley, 1997). It is worth mentioning here that Nruanghmei is the alternate name of Zeme (Burling, 2003).

The present work consists of nine chapters: 1. Introduction, 2. Review of Literature, 3. Phonology, 4. Noun Morphology, 5. Verb Morphology, 6. Constituent Order, 7. Phrase Structure, 8. Clause and Sentence Structure, and 9. Conclusions.

Chapter I provides the introduction of Zeme language such as its name, its linguistic affiliation, its population, its demographic and geographical location, its status etc. and finally explains the methodology used in the language.

Chapter II provides an overview of literature on Zeme language. No healthy linguistic works are available in the language. Most of the works in the language are mainly on the historical and socio-cultural aspects of the Zeme which includes

Gangumei Kamei (1992) *'A History of Zeliangrong Naga'*, Spectrum publications, Guwahati & Delhi; Bower Ursula Graham (1952) *Naga Path*, Reader Union, London; Th. Baba Chandra Singha, (1996) *'The Socio-Economic Life of Zeme Naga in the Twentieth Century'*, unpublished Ph. D dissertation, Department of History, Manipur University. Pauning Haikam, Kedutso Kapfo (2011) *'Zeme Folktales'*, Mysore; Central Institute of Indain Languages. Zeme Literature Committee, N.C. Hills District, Assam (2008), *'Teluichu Dictionary' (Anglo-Zeme)*. Zeme Council North East India (2012), *'Zeme Cultural Heritages and Customary Laws'*.

The linguistic works on Zeme is very limited. Some of the related linguistic work available on Zeme language is Grierson-Konow's (1903) ***Linguistics Survey of India Vol. III, Part II***, Culcutta; Geoffrey Edward Morrison (1967) ***'The Classification of the Naga Languages of North-East India'***; I.D. Raguibou (2015) ***'The Comparative Phonology of Zeme, Liangmai and Rongmei'*** unpublished Ph. D dissertation, Department of Linguistics, Assam University, Silchar.

Chapter III deals with the phonology of Zeme. There are twenty (20) consonantal phonemes, */p, b, t, d, k, g, p^h, t^h, k^h, č, s, z, h, m, n, ŋ, l, r, w, y/* in Zeme. According to their place of articulation, they can be categorized as bilabial, alveolar, palatal, velar and glottal. Similarly in terms of their manner of articulation, consonant phonemes of Zeme can be categorized into stops, fricatives, nasals, trill, lateral

and approximant. Zeme has nine stops i.e., */p, b, p^h, t, d, t^h, k, g, k^h/*, one affricates */č/*, three fricatives */s, z, h/*, three nasals */m, n, ŋ/* one literal */l/*, one trill */r/* and two approximant */w, y/* and six vowel phonemes i.e., */e, i, ə, a, u* and *o/* in its phonemic inventory. It is stated that Zeme has nine stops consisting of aspirated voiceless stops */p^h, t^h, k^h/* and un-aspirated voiced /b, d/ which lack their aspirated counterpart */b^h/* and */d^h/*. As in most of South Asian languages, aspiration is phonemic in Zeme and the voicing is also one of distinctive features in the case of consonantal phonemes in the language. Zeme has three nasal sounds */m, n, and ŋ*/, all of them occur in all three positions viz., initially, medially and finally. Other consonant sounds in the language are affricate */č/,* fricatives */s, z, h /,* lateral */l/,* trill */r/* and approximant */w/*and /*y/* respectively. All the consonantal phonemes in Zeme cannot occur in all the three positions. However, consonants including nasals, */m, n, ŋ/* and voiceless stops, */p, t, k/* can occur in all the three positions of the word. Like many other Tibeto-Burman languages, Zeme is a tonal language in which a change in the pitch of the syllable corresponds to a change in its meaning. Zeme has two tones namely (i) rising and (ii) falling.

Zeme has six diphthongs */ai, ao, oi, əu, ui, əi/*. Out of which, four are gliding towards [I]: /ai/, /oi/, /ui/, and /əi/ and only one diphthong /əu/ goes towards [U]. All the six diphthongs cannot occur in all the three position. They occur in medial and final position only. Among these, diphthong */ao/* cannot occur in medial position and the occurrence of diphthongs */oi/* in the final position is rare in Zeme.

In Zeme, consonant sequence can be discussed in three different categories as: (1) Gemination, (2) Homorganic and (3) Contiguous. A consonant sequence in Zeme generally occurs in word medial position. Vowel sequence is not found in the language. In Zeme, syllables can be classified into three major types as: (i) mono-syllabic (ii) disyllabic and (iii) tri-syllabic.

Chapter IV deals with some aspects of noun morphology in Zeme. It discusses noun and its different types as gender, number, numerals, case and postpositions and pronouns. Noun in Zeme may be defined as a class of words that can be postposed for morphemes for number, gender and cases etc. Syntactically, nouns in Zeme could also be functioned as the nucleus of a noun phrase i.e., the head of a noun phrase. Structurally, nouns in Zeme can be classified into three types as basic nouns, derived nouns and compound nouns. Semantically, noun in Zeme can be divided into common and proper noun. Like many other Tibeto-Burman languages Zeme has no grammatical gender. In other words, the gender distinction in the language is determined on the basis of natural sex. The male and female is expressed by adding marker *-pəiyu* for male and *-pui* for female respectively for human nouns. Non-human nouns are marked by the suffix-*səi* for male and the same marker *-pui* is used for female respectively. All the inanimate nouns are considered as neuter gender in the language. Zeme has two numbers viz. singular and plural. Singular forms of nouns are not marked overtly while the plural is

formed by the suffix *-rəme*. In contrast to the former ones, personal pronouns are pluralized by adding plural morpheme *-nui* to pronouns.

Numeral system in Zeme is mainly of the decimal type. However, the vigesimal system is also found in the language. Most of the numeral roots in the language are mono-morphemic. Bi-morphemic numerals in the language are root plus prefixes for instance, *ə-ket 'one'*, *ke-na 'two'*, *mə-dai 'four'* etc. Compounding is the productive morphological process to form the higher numerals in the language. Numerals in Zeme are classified into cardinals, ordinals, multiplicative, fractional, distributive and restrictive. Numeral roots like *ket* 'one', *na* 'two', *čum* 'three', *ŋəiyu* 'five', *rok* 'six', *na* 'seven' and *kui* 'nine' in Zeme seems to be Proto-Tibeto-Burman numerals as *kat, *g-ni-s, *g-sum, *l-ŋa~*b-ŋa, *d-ruk, *s-nis and *d-kuw as reconstructed by (Benedict, 1972, Matisoff, 1995). Zeme has eight cases viz. Nominative, Accusative, Dative, Locative, Genitive, Instrumental, Associative and Ablative case. Case relations in Zeme are expressed by means of postpositions.

Pronouns in Zeme may be classified into Personal pronoun, Demonstrative pronoun, Interrogative pronoun, Reflexive pronoun and Indefinite pronoun. Personal Pronoun in Zeme differentiates three persons and two number i.e., first, second and third person with singular and plural. The three personal pronouns are monosyllabic in nature. The second person personal pronoun *nəŋ* seems to be Proto Tibeto-Burman **naŋ* (Benedict 1972). The first and third persons plural are

formed by the suffixation of *-nui* to the first and third person pronominal clitics: *ə* and *pə*, whereas the plural of second person personal pronoun is formed by the suffixing *-nui* directly to the second person personal pronoun *nəŋ.*

Chapter V deals about verb morphology of Zeme language. It discusses verb and its different types and functions. Verbs in Zeme are those root morphemes which are capable of taking tense, aspects, moods, causative and negative markers. All the verbs in Zeme are bound forms as they cannot stand independently in any construction. Most of the mono-syllabic verbs in Zeme seem to be in open syllables. In other words, the close monosyllabic verb roots are not frequently found in the language. Structurally verbs in Zeme can be classified into (i) simple and (ii) compound verbs.

Zeme verbs are further classified as (i) transitive and (ii) intransitive. Morphologically there is no distinction between transitive and intransitive verbs in the language. However, the duo can be categorized by their arguments in the language. Transitive verbs in Zeme have agent and object arguments. The grammatical functions of agent and object are generally indicated by word order and postpositional 'case' markers i.e., the agent NP precedes the object NP, which in turn precedes the verb. Transitive verbs in Zeme can be sub-classified into two (i) mono-transitive and (ii) di-transitive. In ditransitive construction, the order of constituents is either AGENT - INDIRECT OBJECT - DIRECT OBJECT or AGENT - DIRECT OBJECT - INDIRECT OBJECT. Intransitive verbs in Zeme

cannot take object arguments i.e. they may either be stative or action verbs. Semantically, verbs in Zeme can further be classified into following categories: (i) verbs of action (ii) verb of cognition (iii) verbs of cooking (iv) verbs of existence (v) verbs of grooming (vi) verbs of instrument/fighting (vi) verb of motion (vii) verb of occupation etc. There are four aspects in Zeme language as (i) simple aspects (ii) progressive aspects (iii) perfective aspects and (iv) irrealis aspects. Moods in Zeme language are classified into (i) imperative (ii) permissive (iii) capability (iv) obligatory (v) probability (vi) conditional (vii) necessity (viii) intensive and so on.

Adjectives in the language do not employ as a distinct category of words as noun and verb do. Semantically, adjectives can be categorized into various categories as, dimension, human propensity, colour, age, value etc.

Adverbs in Zeme always precede the verbs. In other words, the adverbs in Zeme cannot occur in the post-verbal position. Adverbs in some of the Sino Tibeto-Burman languages like Chinese either precedes or follows the verbs, however all adverbs in Zeme cannot follow the verbs. Syntactically adverbs in Zeme can be classified into two types viz., (1) simple and (ii) derived. Semantically, adverbs in Zeme are further categorized into following types (i) adverbs of manner (ii) adverbs of location and direction (iii) adverbs of time and (iv) adverbs of degree.

Chapter VI deals with the order of constituents in Zeme. In other words, the orders of different grammatical elements are discussed in this chapter. The basic constituent order of words in Zeme is SOV (Subject, Object and Verb). However, the order of subject and verb in intransitive sentences in Zeme is: [S V]. In other words, the subject always precedes the verb. In Zeme, the adjectival usually follows the head noun, however adjectival may also precede the head noun as most of the SOV languages do.

Chapter VII provides an overview of basic noun and verb phrase structure in the language. A phrase that functions as the subject or object of a verb can be termed as noun phrase in which nouns most commonly act as a headword. A noun phrase in Zeme, a noun phrase may consist of a head noun and one or more modifiers. Modifiers may be a nominal, an adjectival, a demonstrative, or a numeral. The coordinators express the coordination in Zeme, which may be either conjunctive or disjunctive. Verb phrase in Zeme must consist of a verb and some other optional elements (NPs or Adverb) which generally precede the verb. Like many other Tibeto-Burman languages, Zeme verb phrase must have a verb, whereas NPs or adverbs are optionally present in the phrase. In other words, the core of a verb phrase is a verbal nucleus consisting of one or more verbs i.e., either lexical or be verbs.

Chapter VIII deals with clause and its sentence structure of Zeme. This chapter provides an overview of different types of clauses, nominalization, reflexivization,

causativization, relativization, interrogatives, negation and finally the type of sentences in Zeme. There are three basic types of clauses viz. declarative, interrogative and imperative. In Zeme declarative clause is marked by a suffix *-ləi*, the imperative clause is marked by imperative marker *-ləu*, however, Zeme used question word *čao* 'who' *dai* 'what' etc. or question marker *-məi* to form the interrogative clause. Zeme has no relative pronoun. However, the nominalizer -be is used to forms relative clause in the language. Negation in Zeme is mainly expressed by means of particles: *mak* and Zeme has a special form of the prohibitive marker *-so* that does not occur in non-imperative clauses (declarative and interrogatives). Furthermore, sentence in Zeme may be classified into three types, viz. (i) simple (ii) complex and (iii) compound.

Chapter IX deals with findings and summary. There are three appendixes in this thesis. The first and second appendix deals with the folktales of Zeme. The third appendix gives some common vocabulary of the language with the name of months, days, different season and so on.