GENDER MARKING IN POULA

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Abstract - "The word 'gender' is used not just for a group of nouns but also for the whole category; thus, we may say that a particular language has, say, three genders, masculine, feminine and neuter, and that the language has the category of gender" (Corbett 1999:1). David Crystal (2008:206) discussed gender as "A grammatical category used for the analyses of masculine, feminine and neuter, animate and inanimate etc". This paper aims to explore the various types of gender in Poula, a language belonging to the Tibeto-Burman branch of the Kuki-Chin sub-branch. Poula is one of the three languages spoken by the Chakhesang tribe of Nagaland, with a majority of speakers residing in parts of Manipur. The other two languages spoken by the tribe are Chokri and Khezha, and linguistically, Poula shares a contiguous border with Manipur. This study will focus on the variety of Poula spoken in the Phek district of Nagaland. Despite numerous literary works being done on Chokri and Khezha, Poula remains an unexplored and undocumented dialect. This particular dialect of Chakhesang is relatively unknown even to other Naga language communities.

Index Terms - Gender, Poula, Chakhesang, Phek, Nagaland.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Chakhesangs are a Naga tribe who primarily inhabit the Phek district of Nagaland along with Pochury tribe who consider the district as their tribal headquarters. The name Chakhesang itself reflects three acronyms; *'Cha'* which stands for Chokri, *'Khe'* for Khezha and *'Sang'* for Sangtam. Phek district is made up of three areas and two ranges, of which the present study uses the Razeba range as a point of departure for studying the Poula language. The range is a small one consisting of only three villages and a town who identify ethnically as Poumai. They are Zhavame (Zhamei), Zelome, Tsüpfüme (Chobama), and the town of Razeba with approximately only 6000-9,000 Poula speakers in Nagaland itself. The Poumais are classified as a sub-group of Chakhesang who in turn are further classified as a sub-group of the larger Tenyimia community. Poula language behaves differently from the slightly bigger languages of Chakhesangs - Khezha and Chokri, both morphologically and syntactically.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Until 2021, no linguistic work had been undertaken on the Poula language. The Poula literature committee published the first written literature in the language, a booklet titled *'Poula Primer Dictionary.*' Some linguistic works are available on the variety spoken in Manipur, including Veikho's works from 2014, 2015, 2018, and 2021, which provide a preliminary phonological description of Poula, including its consonants and vowels. Veikho's 2021 is an extensive work which offers a detailed analysis of Poula's grammar.

The Poula Literature Board Committee was established in 2013 with the primary goal of developing the language's orthography and creating reading materials. Their focus includes translating the Bible and hymnals into Poula. Currently, the literature board is working on developing school textbooks for primary education

3. METHODOLOGY

This study is primarily descriptive, focusing on data collected from native speakers of the Razeba area in Phek district. Primary data collection methods include observations, structured and unstructured interviews, and gathering community and personal narratives from speakers of varying gender, age, and occupation. Secondary sources include books, journals, articles, internet sources, official documents, and related literature on the tribe, providing additional information on the language and its speakers

4. GENDER IN POULA

"Gender marking is a way of explicitly signalling that a linguistic expression refers to a male or female being (person or animal)" Müller et. al. (2015). Corbett (1991) cited Hockett's (1958:231) definition of gender which states that "Genders are classes of nouns reflected in the behaviour of associated words". "Among gender languages, two gender systems distinguishing masculine, feminine and neuter, are the most common, although developments in these classificatory systems vary widely from language to language" Singh (1985). Gender can be categorised into 'grammatical gender' and 'natural gender'. Grammatical gender is based on the type of noun, such as masculine or feminine or neuter, and is not tied to sex. Natural gender is based on sex as a biological distinction between male, female or neither male nor female. Like most Tibeto-Burman languages, Poula does not manifest grammatical gender. The gender for human in Poula is of natural type.

4.1 MORPHOLOGICAL GENDER MARKING IN ANIMATE [+HUMAN]

Gender markers are used for both masculine and feminine gender in human nouns. But there are also Ø gender markers where the distinction between male and female are differentiated biologically. Poula utilizes gender markers to distinguish between male and female genders. The male gender is denoted by the marker /-na/, while the female gender is indicated by /-fə/. Interestingly, the marker /-na/ is not exclusively reserved for males; it can also represent the female counterpart, although the reverse is not possible. Moreover, this marker is also employed for inanimate entities, one such example is: /tsu/ 'stone' and /tsu-na/ 'the stone'. When referring to animate humans, the masculine marker is /-pu/, as in /akimepu/ 'husband', while the feminine marker is /-fə/, as in /akimefə/ 'wife'. It is worth noting that the use of the feminine marker /-fə/ is more limited, with the neuter marker /-na/ often being used as the masculine marker in many instances.

4.1.1 AGENTIVE NOUN

In Poula, the agentive noun exhibits morphological marking through two distinct morphemes, each exclusive to either male or female. The agentive noun typically undergoes nominalization through the use of the human marker /-me/, functioning as a nominalizer within the language. However, in the context of gender marking, a morpho-phonological phenomenon occurs where the nominalizer /-me/ in its generic form is elided upon suffixation by the gender marker, as illustrated in the table below. The morpheme /-na/, employed in the masculine gender, encompasses entities that are inanimate and non-human, extending its applicability beyond animate humans. To specify gender as either male or female, markers such as /-na/, /-pu/, /-fə/, or /-pe/ are suffixed to the generic form, thereby indicating gender distinction.

Table 1. Gender marking in Agentive noun

Natural	Masculine	Feminine
/tɪətaome/ 'leader'	/tɪətana/ or /tɪətanapu/ 'male leader'	/tɪətafə/ or /tɪətafəpe/ 'female leader'
/ʧipaome/ 'speaker'	/ʧipana/ or /ʧipanapu/ 'male speaker'	/ʧipanafə or /ʧipanafəpe/ 'female speaker'
/mədoapime/ 'teacher'	/mədoapina/ or /mədoapinapu/ 'male teacher'	/mədoapifə/ or /mədoapifəpe/ 'female teacher'
/ləusəume/ 'singer'	/ləusəuna/ or /ləusunapu/ 'male singer'	/ləusəunafə/ or /ləusəunafəpe/ 'female singer'
/darubabume/ 'doctor'	/darubabupu/ or /darubabuna/ 'male doctor'	/darubabufə/ or /darubabufəpe/ 'female doctor'
/mutrufome/ 'chairman'	/mutrufona/ or /mutrufonapu/ 'male chairman'	/mutrufonafə/ or mutrufonafəpe/ 'female chairman'

Sentential examples:

1. a)   *ʧipa-napu   pu   pəu*
      speaker-M   2SG   father
      'The male speaker is her father'

   b)   *ʧipana-fəpe   pu   fə*
      speaker-F   2SG   mother
      'The female speaker is her mother'

2. a)   *ləusu-napu   avi   mədoapime*
      singer-M   my   teacher
      'The male singer is my teacher'

   b)   *ləusu-fəpe   avi   mədoapime*
      singer-F   my   teacher
      'The female singer is my teacher'

4.1.2 PROPER NOUN

Similar to its neighbouring languages such as Tenyidie or Chokri, Poula features morphological marking on personal nouns. In Poula, female names are consistently denoted by the marker /-ne/ and male names by /-ni/, as exemplified in Table 2. However, numerous other morphemes serve as suffixes to indicate gender. The morpheme /-ne/, is specifically reserved for female names. Interestingly, male names in Poula do not possess a fixed marker for gender. Instead, the markers found in male names are flexible and can be used interchangeably for female names. This flexibility underscores the dynamic nature of gender markers in Poula, allowing for a fluidity in their application across different genders. These gender-specific markers are invariably affixed to the noun. Moreover, gender can be discerned in names that lack these markers. Notably, certain common nouns demonstrate gender marking, such as /adu/ 'king' and /adufəpe/ 'queen'. While the masculine term stands as a lexical word in its own, the feminine term is suffixed by the female gender marker /-fəpe/

Table 2. Gender marking in Personal noun

Masculine	Feminine
/dani/	/dane/
/ɹevini/	/ɹevine/
/saləni/	/saləne/
/pani/	/pane/

4.1.3 LEXICAL GENDER

Kinship terms in Poula inherently convey gender specificity, signifying male and female relatives respectively. While some elements, such as proper nouns and a few kinship terms, may take gender markers, the majority of kinship terms in Poula are lexical, meaning the term itself indicates the gender of the relative.
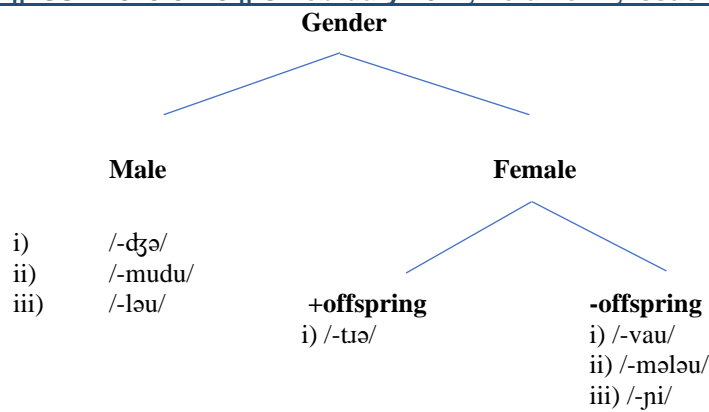
Table 3. Gender marking in Lexical terms

Masculine	Feminine
/pəu/ 'father-in-law'	/ne/ 'mother-in-law'
/pau/ 'grandfather'	/pe/ 'grandmother'
/pɹəu/ 'brother'[1]	/tupe/ 'sister'[2]
/pəutəumiame/ 'widower'	/natəumiame/ 'widow'
/pa/ 'uncle'	/ne/ 'aunty'

4.2 MORPHOLOGICAL GENDER MARKING IN ANIMATE [-HUMAN]

The gender markers for animate non-human entities distinguish between male and female animals, and further distinctions are made between females with offspring and those without. Several markers (as depicted in Figure 1) are used to express gender in animate non-human beings, which are suffixed to the generic form. It is noteworthy that the female gender is indicated by different markers depending on the presence or absence of offspring. The suffix /-tɹə/ is added to the generic form to indicate a female animal with offspring, whereas /-vau/, /-mələu/, and /-ɲi/ are used to denote female animals without offspring.

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[1] address by female to their brother
/dʑəɹe/ elder brother or /tʰeŋ̊u/ younger brother
[2] address by male to their sister
/dʑəɹepe/ elder sister or /tʰeŋ̊upe/ younger sister

Gender

Male   Female

i)   /-ʤə/
ii)   /-mudu/
iii)   /-ləu/

                   +offspring   **-offspring**
                   i) /-tɹə/   i) /-vau/
                                      ii) /-mələu/
                                      iii) /-ɲi/

Figure. 1 Distribution of animate [-human] markers

A notable aspect of animate non-human is the specific usage of markers to denote gender and reproductive status. In this context, the marker /-ʤə/ is exclusively applied to male animals with feathers, while /-vau/ is reserved for female animals in this category who do not have offspring, as delineated in Table 4. Similarly, markers such as /-mudu/ and /-ləu/ are employed for male animals, whereas /-tɹə/ and /-ɲi/ are used for female animals with and without offspring, respectively.

Table 4. Animate non-human gender markers

Neuter	Masculine	Feminine (+offspring)	Feminine (-offspring)
/həu/ 'chicken'	/həudʒə/	/həutɹə/	/həuvau/
/ɹahu/ 'bird'	/ɹahuɹidʒə/	/ɹahuɹitrə/	---
/ɹo/ 'peacock'	/ɹoɹidʒə/	/ɹoɹitrə/	---
/kʰau/ 'tiger'	/kʰaumudu/	/kʰautɹə/	/kʰauɲi/
/vo/ 'pig'	/voləu/	/votrə/	/voɲi/
/muɲi/ 'wild pig'	/muɲikʰauləu/	/muɲitrə/	/muɲikʰauɲi/
/osa/ 'cat'	/saləu/	/satɹə/	/saɲi/
/lilikʰu/ 'squirrel'	/lilikʰukʰauləu/	/lilikutɹə	/lilikʰkʰauɲi/
/kʰautsutsuli/ 'lion'	/kʰatsutsulikʰauləu/	/kʰatsutsutɹə/	/kʰatsutsutɹəkʰauɲi/
/uva/ 'monkey'	/uvakʰauləu/	/uvatrə/	/uva kʰauɲi/
/ʃi/ 'dog'	/ʃiləu/	/ʃitɹə/	/ʃiɲi/

An additional intriguing aspect of animate non-human entities in the language is the distinctive marker associated with animals possessing horns (or the potential for horns). As illustrated in Table 5, the marker /-mudu/ is exclusively employed for male animals exhibiting horns. The females in this category which lacks offspring are suffixed with /-mələu/ to their generic form.

Table 5. Animate non-human (+horns)

Neutral	Masculine	Feminine (+offspring)	Feminine (-offspring)
/ʧo/ 'cow'	/ʧomudu/	/ʧotrə/	/ʧomələu/
/vi/ 'mithun'	/vimudu/	/vitɹə/	/vimələu/
/ʃu/ 'deer'	/ʃumudu/	/sutɹə/	/ʃumələu/
/hu/ 'rhino'	/humudu/	/hutɹə/	/humələu/
/tʰɹo/ 'steak'	/tʰɹomudu/	/tʰɹotrə/	/tʰɹomələu/
/pɹau/ 'elephant'	/pɹaumudu/	/pɹautɹə/	/pɹaumuləu/

The following markers or affixes serve to differentiate between male and female entities in the language.

Male markers:

-na	-occurs with human + male
-pu	- occurs with human + male
-pəu	- occurs with human + male + adult + father + father-in-law
-mo	- occurs with human + male + adult + brother-in-law
-ʧi	- occurs with human + male + adult + brother-in-law
pəu-	- occurs with human + male + adult + widower
-ʤə	- occurs with biped + male hornless + feather + fowl
-mudu	- occurs with animal + male + hornless + wild
-ləu	- occurs with animal + male + hornless + domestic + wild

Female markers:

-pe	- occurs with human + female
-fə	- occurs with human + female + adult + mother
-ne	- occurs with human + female + adult + mother-in-law
na-	- occurs with human + female + adult + widow
-tɪə	- occurs with animal + biped + female + offspring + domestic + wild
-vau	- occurs with animal + biped + female + domestic
-mələu	- occurs with animal + female + horn + wild
-ŋi	- occurs with animal + female + domestic + wild

CONCLUSION

Poula exhibits a complex system of gender marking, employing distinct markers and affixes to differentiate between masculine and feminine genders in animate human, as well as animate non-human entities. The nominalizer /-me/ is elided upon suffixation by the gender marker. The language's gender markers demonstrate some flexibility, with certain markers like /-na/ which is capable of representing both male and female genders. This phenomenon, however, is not bidirectional, as the other markers for male and female genders are not interchangeable. Additionally, in personal pronouns, the morpheme /-ne/ is exclusively designated for use with female names in Poula. In contrast, male names in the language lack a fixed gender marker. Instead, the markers typically associated with male names demonstrate a remarkable degree of flexibility, as they can be utilized interchangeably for female names. This adaptability highlights the dynamic nature of gender markers in Poula, facilitating their application across various genders with fluidity. Furthermore, Poula utilizes gender markers in various contexts, including personal nouns, kinship terms, and animate non-human entities, reflecting a nuanced understanding of gender within its linguistic framework.

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