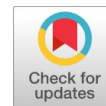


# Pluralization in Barman Thar: An Endangered Language

Primly Baruah



**Abstract:** This paper examines the process of pluralisation in Barman Thar, an endangered language of Assam. This study aims to investigate the morphological and syntactic mechanisms involved in marking plurality in Barman Thar. The data collected for this paper are based solely on primary data gathered through fieldwork in Khoirabari and Tangla, located in Udalguri and Baksa districts of Assam. Singulars are unmarked in Barman Thar, and plurals are marked by suffixes like *-taŋ* and *-phara*, both of which are lexically and morphologically conditioned. Other syntactic categories, like numerals and reduplications, are also involved in forming plurality. Tibeto-Burman features, such as copula-drop and the lack of subject-verb agreement, can also be observed here. This paper not only attempts to investigate the Pluralisation process in Barman Thar but also supports the effort to revitalise this endangered language by documenting morphosyntactic patterns.

**Keywords:** Barman Thar, Pluralization, Reduplication, Numerals

## Abbreviations:

LOC: Locative Case  
PL: Plural Number  
DEM: Demonstrative Pronoun  
NOM: Nominative Case  
3P: Third Person  
2P: Second Person  
PROG: Progressive  
IMP: Imperfective Case  
RED: Reduplication  
FUT: Future Tense  
ACC: Accusative Case  
NEG: Negative  
PST: Past Tense  
SG: Singular  
PFV: Perfective Marker

## I. INTRODUCTION

Barman Thar is a highly endangered Tibeto-Burman language of Assam, with a population of fewer than 25,000. However, this figure does not count the actual number of people who can speak this language. They call themselves Kachari owing to their Kachari lineage. Particularly spoken in the districts of Baksa and Udalguri in Assam, as well as in some parts of Tripura and Arunachal Pradesh. Various factors, including the domination of regional languages such as Assamese and Bodo, threaten the linguistic vitality of

Barman Thar.

According to UNESCO's language endangerment criteria, factors such as intergenerational transmission and attitude of the speakers play a crucial role in language shift [5]. They also use Assamese as their medium of instruction. One more factor that contributes to the endangerment of this language is prestige-driven language shift; they choose to speak Assamese over Barman Thar.

In Barman Thar, there are two types of numbers: singular and plural. Singular is unmarked here, and plural is marked. To know the difference, an example is given below:

maip<sup>h</sup>utaŋ məsadəŋ  
maip<sup>h</sup>u-taŋ məsa-dəŋ  
girl-PL dance-PROG

Girls are dancing

In the above example, *maip<sup>h</sup>u*, meaning girl and *-taŋ* is the plural marker.

## II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

To date, no study on Barman Thar Pluralisation has been carried out. Being a lesser-known and highly endangered language, it has remained largely undocumented in terms of its grammatical structure. The present study aims to fill the gaps by exploring the process of pluralisation in Barman Thar. The present study will also contribute to future research in the fields of morphology and syntax. Morphological structures of language provided by Lyons [1] and Crystal [2] provide insights for this paper. However, several studies on plural marking in other Tibeto-Burman languages have provided valuable insights into the Tibeto-Burman language family. For example, Bhattacharya (2015) examines nominal pluralisation in Bodo, a closely related Tibeto-Burman language [3]. Similarly, Joseph and Burling (2001) offer their perspectives on plural marking in the whole Tibeto-Burman area [4].

### A. Aims and Objectives

Various topics in this language have not been researched. This study aims to determine the morphological and syntactic functions that describe how plurals are formed in this language.

### B. Hypotheses

- There are two plural markers in Barman Thar, which are semantically and lexically conditioned.
- Barman Thar has reduplications of nouns and pronouns.
- Plurals are morphologically marked, whereas singulars are morphologically unmarked.

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## III. METHOD

The data collected for this paper were primarily gathered through fieldwork in Khoirabari and Tangla, located in the Udalguri and Baksa districts of Assam. Direct interactions with native speakers of the Barman Kachari community were carried out. Speech samples were collected irrespective of age, class, caste, and social background. The recorded data were then linguistically analysed to write this paper. The findings in this paper are purely generated from the primary investigation done by the author. Bower [6] highlights a few practices in descriptive fieldwork that are adopted here.

## IV. RESULTS

Pluralisation in the Tibeto-Burman languages often represents a morphosyntactic phenomenon. Unlike Indo-Aryan languages, which rely on inflexions to mark plurality, Tibeto-Burman languages employ both lexical and syntactic means to mark plurality. Some languages use a plural marker with nouns or pronouns, while others employ reduplication and numerals to denote plurality.

When it comes to Barman Thar, there are two types of numbers: Singular and Plural. Singular forms in Barman Thar are morphologically unmarked, whereas plural forms are always morphologically marked in Barman Thar. The process of Pluralization is both syntactic and morphological. The methods are discussed below:

### A. Morphological Process

There are two plural suffixes in Barman Thar, namely -taŋ and -p<sup>h</sup>ara. These suffixes are semantically conditioned based on their meanings.

Usually, the suffix -taŋ is suffixed with common nouns, demonstrative pronouns, personal pronouns, reflexive pronouns, and reciprocal pronouns to denote plurality. Some examples are given below:

### B. Common Noun

Singular	Plural	
məŋgou ‘cat’	məŋgoutaŋ	‘Cats’
asak ‘dog’	asaktaŋ	‘Dogs’
bizak ‘leaf’	bizaktaŋ	‘Leaves’
dəmdəma ‘elephant’	dəmdəmataŋ	‘Elephants’
p <sup>h</sup> aŋ ‘tree’	p <sup>h</sup> aŋtaŋ	‘Trees’

### C. Example in a Sentence

k<sup>h</sup>adou bit<sup>h</sup>aitaŋ baŋk<sup>h</sup>al dəŋ  
 k<sup>h</sup>ad-ou bit<sup>h</sup>ai-taŋ baŋk<sup>h</sup>al dəŋ  
 Basket-LOC fruit-PL may be  
 There are many fruits in the basket.  
 sirak<sup>h</sup>anaou gənd<sup>h</sup>artaŋ baŋk<sup>h</sup>al dəŋ  
 sirak<sup>h</sup>ana-ou gənd<sup>h</sup>ar-taŋ baŋk<sup>h</sup>al dəŋ  
 zoo-LOC rhino-PL may be  
 There are many rhinos in the zoo.  
 isa masataŋ baŋk<sup>h</sup>al dəŋ  
 isa masa-taŋ baŋk<sup>h</sup>al dəŋ  
 Here, tiger-PL many be  
 There are many tigers here.

Here, the suffix is phonologically conditioned; no consonant and vowel assimilation can be seen in the words

like dəmdəma (sg) dəmdəma-taŋ (pl) ‘elephants’ and bizak (sg) bizak-taŋ ‘leaves’. The plural marker -taŋ is used with both animate and inanimate nouns, which makes it semantically conditioned too.

### D. Demonstrative Pronouns

Singular	Plural	
ɛba ‘this’	ɛbap <sup>h</sup> ara	‘these’
oba ‘that’	obap <sup>h</sup> ara	‘those’

### E. Example in Sentence

ɛbap<sup>h</sup>ara mēdaia namza  
 ɛba-p<sup>h</sup>ara mēdai-a namza  
 DEM-PL man-NOM bad  
 These men are evil.  
 ɛbap<sup>h</sup>ara zamsia rəmp<sup>h</sup>a  
 ɛba-p<sup>h</sup>ara zamsi-a rəmp<sup>h</sup>a  
 DEM-PL chilli-NOM rotten  
 These chillies are rotten.  
 ɛbap<sup>h</sup>ara buia namma  
 ɛba-p<sup>h</sup>ara bui-a namma  
 DEM-PL book-NOM good  
 These books are good.

In the above examples, it is seen that the noun mēdai ‘man’ has a nominative marker -a, and the word rəmp<sup>h</sup>a ‘rotten’ is seen without a copula, which makes this a copula-drop structure like many Tibeto-Burman languages.

### F. Personal Pronoun

Singular	Plural	
na ‘you’	nap <sup>h</sup> ara	‘you (PL)’
owa ‘s/he’	owap <sup>h</sup> ara	‘they’

### G. Example in a Sentence

owap<sup>h</sup>ara hibadəŋ  
 owa-p<sup>h</sup>ara hiba-dəŋ  
 3P-PL come-PROG  
 They are coming.  
 nap<sup>h</sup>ara mesadəŋ  
 na-p<sup>h</sup>ara mesa-dəŋ  
 2P-PL dance-PROG  
 You (pl) are dancing.

Here, person number agreement is clearly shown in the above examples. And, hiba-dəŋ ‘coming’ and mesa-dəŋ ‘dancing’ show that -dəŋ is the progressive marker here. Here, subject marking has been accomplished using pronouns only.

### H. Reflexive Pronoun

#### i. Example in Sentence:

owap<sup>h</sup>ara dənp<sup>h</sup>ara kuriza  
 owa-p<sup>h</sup>ara dənp<sup>h</sup>ara kuriza  
 s/he-PL self-PL do-PST  
 They did it themselves.

Reflexive pronouns mark the relation between the subject and the object. In the example



below, "phara" is the plural marker, which suffixes after the third person. Here -za is the past tense marker. This sentence shows a reflexive construction. The plural markers on subject owaphara 'they' and dɔnp<sup>h</sup>ara 'themselves' show agreement.

### I. Personal Proper Noun

Singular	Plural	
Kalpana	kalpana-taŋ	'Kalpana and others'
Rama	ramataŋ	'rama and others'
Rima	rimataŋ	'Rima and others'

### J. Example in Sentence

kalpanataŋ məsadəŋ  
kalpana-taŋ məsadəŋ  
Kalpana-PL dance-PROG  
Kalpana and others are dancing.  
Rimataŋ hiba dəŋ  
Rimataŋ hiba dəŋ  
Rima-PL come-PROG  
Rima and others are coming

The plural morpheme -taŋ is directly added to the proper noun in the above examples. In hibadəŋ 'coming' and məsadəŋ 'dancing', -dəŋ is the progressive aspect marker and the verb is seen inflecting with a progressive marker.

### K. Pluralization Process of Kinship Terms

Singular	Plural	
p <sup>h</sup> a 'father'	p <sup>h</sup> ataŋ	'fathers'
nana 'sister'	nanataŋ	'sisters'
azəŋ 'aunt'	azəŋtaŋ	'aunties'
bunu 'brother-in-law'	bunutaŋ	'brothers-in-law'

### L. Example in Sentence

p<sup>h</sup>ataŋ aithou dəŋ  
p<sup>h</sup>a-taŋ aithou dəŋ  
father-PL here be-PRES  
Fathers are here.  
aŋa azəŋtaŋ hiŋdəŋ  
aŋa azəŋ-taŋ hiŋ-dəŋ  
my aunt-PL go-PROG  
my aunties are going

In the above examples, plurality is marked on the noun only. Stem alternation is not seen. Plurality is suffixed with the noun here. dəŋ 'be' does not change at all. hiŋ-dəŋ 'going' does not show subject agreement in the above example.

## V. SYNTACTIC PROCESS

There are several syntactic processes involved in Pluralization. They are: numerals and reduplication. Numerals are one of the common ways to denote plurality. Reduplication consists of the repetition of a word to represent a change of meaning. In reduplication, the repetition of nouns indicates more than one instance.

### A. Numerals

Numerals play a crucial role in the process of Pluralization. Some sentence examples are given below:

gini p<sup>h</sup>ant<sup>h</sup>ai məsadəŋ  
gini p<sup>h</sup>ant<sup>h</sup>ai məsa-dəŋ  
two boys dance-PROG  
Two boys are dancing.  
k<sup>h</sup>ad rizisa habako  
k<sup>h</sup>ad rizisa haba-ko  
basket hundred bring-IMP  
Bring a hundred baskets.  
apel git<sup>h</sup>am həŋko  
apel git<sup>h</sup>am həŋ-ko  
Apple three take-IMP  
Take three apples.

Here, the number functions as a syntactic category. No overt plural marking on the noun is seen in the above examples; the numerals denote plurality. The noun remains invariant. Verbs do not show number agreement. In the above examples, -ko is the imperative marker.

### B. Reduplication

Reduplication is a word formation process that serves as a grammatical category. Reduplication involves the repetition of a word or syllable.

### C. Example in Sentence

rahula nək nək hiŋdəŋ  
rahul-a nək nək hiŋ-ja  
Rahul-NOM house-RED go-PFV  
Rahul is going from house to house.

In the example above, the nək 'house' is reduplicated, which shows continuous aspect. nək 'house' is followed by the perfective marker -ja. There is no difference between the plural formation of nouns via reduplication and plural suffixation to nouns; the only difference that exists here is the grammatical pluralisation process.

### D. Reduplication of Pronouns

Reduplication of pronouns is found in two types of sentences, interrogative and indefinite.

Some examples are given below:

### E. Interrogative

hat<sup>h</sup>ou sara sara hiŋgan  
hat<sup>h</sup> – ou sara sara hiŋ-gan  
Market-LOC who-RED go-FUT  
Who is going to the market?

This sentence implies that 'who (all) is going to the market?'. Pronoun reduplication here suggests questioning or interrogatives, and hence, no question particle is seen. The future tense suffix is -gan. -You is the locative marker here.

### F. Indefinite

doisataŋ baŋk<sup>h</sup>al baŋk<sup>h</sup>al buiko poriza  
doisa-taŋ baŋk<sup>h</sup>al baŋk<sup>h</sup>al bui-ko pori-za  
child-PL many-RED book-ACC read-NEG



Children do not read many books.

In the above example, *baŋk<sup>h</sup>al* ‘many’ does not indicate a specific number of books, but suggests the number of books in a non-specific sense. Quantifier reduplication is evident here, rather than pronoun reduplication.

## VI. CONCLUSION

This paper studies the process of pluralization in Barman Thar. It has been noted that plural marking is both semantically and lexically conditioned, with reduplication playing a crucial role in the formation of plurals. The singulars are unmarked in Barman Thar, whereas the plurals are always marked. The plural suffixes are *-taŋ* and *-p<sup>h</sup>ara*, which indicate a wide range of noun types, like common nouns, reflexive pronouns, demonstrative pronouns, and reciprocal pronouns. Suffix *-taŋ* is used with both animate and inanimate nouns—the pluralization process in transparent, which shows no phonological assimilation. There is a copula drop and absence of phonological assimilation in the sentence, which is a common feature of the Tibeto-Burman language [2]. An instance is given below:

*ebataŋ zamsia rɔmp<sup>h</sup>a*

*eba-taŋ zamsi-a rɔmp<sup>h</sup>a*

DEM-PL chilli-NOM rotten

These chillies are rotten.

The subject is marked by pronouns only. *-dɔŋ* is a progressive marker which precedes the verb. In proper nouns, pluralization is suffixed with the appropriate noun (*kalpanataŋ*). These proper nouns function with the verb phrase. Plurality in kinship is morphologically marked, and no stem alteration is there as the suffix precedes the noun. Numerals are also used to denote plurality (*gini* ‘two’, *rizisa* ‘hundred’). Verbs (*mɛsa-dɔŋ* ‘dancing’, *haba-ko* ‘bring’ denote no agreement with the subject. Reduplication also plays a crucial role in the formation of plurals in Barman Thar.

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## DECLARATION STATEMENT

I must verify the accuracy of the following information as the article's author.

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- **Data Access Statement and Material Availability:** The adequate resources of this article are publicly accessible.
- **Author's Contributions:** The authorship of this article is contributed solely by the author.

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My work aims to contribute to the documentation and analysis of undocumented languages in Northeast India, thereby supporting efforts to revitalise and promote them.

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