

Use of third person pronoun in Assamese as divine pronouns

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Abstract

The paper attempts to show a relationship between the language and religious thought and practice. The topic of the paper falls under the branch of linguistics known as theolinguistics. It is a broad branch of linguistics; this paper will only deal with pronouns which are used to refer to God. The paper attempts to show the use of third person pronouns in Assamese language. There have been continuous debates on the use of divine pronouns in different languages. Most of the languages use pronouns to refer to God or anything related to God. For example- in English, "he" is used as divine pronoun. In this paper, the third person pronouns are divided according to their uses in different social aspects. Assamese divine pronouns are mostly third person pronouns. But there are evidences of having second person pronoun in direct speech or confession like 'talking with God'.

Keywords: divine pronoun, theolinguistics, Assamese language

1. Introduction

Language is a reflection of one's culture. We can identify a lot of things about one's culture, customs, rituals, belief systems through the language they speak. The term "divine pronoun" refers to the pronoun in a language which is used to refer to God. Some people termed it as "pronouns referring to God","pronouns of God" etc. The paper shows the relationship between Assamese language and its religious beliefs. Through the language we can assume many things about the culture and its religion. Assamese is an Eastern Indo-Aryan language spoken mainly in the state of Assam, India. Assamese culture is greatly influenced by Hinduism. Most of the Assamese people are Hindu by religion. Therefore, the language shows its influences of Hinduism through its linguistic characteristics. Assamese is a pro-drop language. It has both inflectional and agglutinative features. The word order of Assamese is subject-object-verb.

Methodology and data collection

The descriptive methodology is taken for this paper. The researcher has taken the data from her real life experience of the language. The researcher has chosen her own native village for data collection. The village "Porbotia" is situated in the district of Sivasagar, Assam. There are more than 1000 people in the village. The villager's native language is Assamese. The researcher has divided the third person divine pronouns in the language according to their different social aspects. The researcher has made a list of the speakers of the village according to their behaviour to divine pronouns in different social aspects.

Numbers of total children: 300

Numbers of total adult: 480

Numbers of total old people: 450

Table 1

Social aspects	children	adult	old
Natural causes	300	480	450
prayers	158	280	450
Life and death	50	100	450
destiny	80	210	450
knowledge	100	180	450

Discussion and findings

Natural causes

- Borokhun di-s-e
 Rain give-pres-3p
 (someone) rain give-pres-3p
 English- it is raining

This sentence doesn't have an overt subject. The inflection in the verb shows that the subject is in the third person. In Assamese culture, it is believed that rain is a cause of Indra Devta. Therefore there is a ritual in Assamese culture which is known as "bhekulir bia" (marriage of frogs); this ritual is done in the season of summer. It is believed that the god of Rain is satisfied after this ritual is done and he blesses Earth for rain. The above example shows that there is someone who gives rain.

- Kaliloi rod di-b-o-ne?
 Tomorrow sunlight give-fut-3p-Q
 English – will there be sunlight tomorrow?

It is believed that all the natural causes are happened by the grace of God. The example is used by one speaker who is confused if there will be sunlight in the next day. Therefore, he is asking someone if there will be sunlight or not? The inflection in the verb shows that the subject is in the third Person.

Prayers

Prayers are always associated with God. When we pray

Referring to God (not directly to God) the subject is always in the third person.

1. Aibar soku meli sa-l-e-i hoi
This time eye open see-pst-3p-emp be
Aibar (tekhete) soku meli salei hoi.
Eng-this time God will see us

The subject in the sentence is covert. The subject is in the third person. This sentence is used when someone expresses his or her prayer in front of someone. The sentence can be also "aibar (tekhete) soku mel salei hoi. "tekhete" is the honorific third person pronoun.

2. Tekhet-or soronot pronam jas-il-u.
He (honorific)-gen leg-loc prayer give-pst-1p
Eng -Prayer to him

"Tekhet" is the third person honorific pronoun in Assamese. The subject is indirectly referring to God.

3. Aji mondirot tekhetoI buli xorai ebhag agborhalu.
Today temple-loc he(honorific)-inf prt prayer one-cl
forward-pst-1p
Eng -Today I have offered my prayer to him in the temple.

Life and death

Teur obosthatu dekhi aibar nib-o jen lagise.
His situation-cl see-NF this time take-fut-3p guess assume-pres-3p
Eng - He is in his death bed.

Assamese is influenced by Hinduism. There is a belief in the religion that death is a job of "yam dut". The example is taken from the conversation between two people. They are discussing about the health condition of an old person. They are assuming that the "yam dut" can take the person's soul at any time.

It is believed in the culture that the newborn baby is God's gift. Therefore, the newborn baby is called as "deva xikhu" (child of God). Here are some conversations between two children. One child's mother is in the hospital. His mother is having another baby.

1. Deutai mule bhonti ajoni anibo.
Eng-my father will bring a sister for me.
Kor pora?
Eng – from where?
Hospital t. (vogobane) di thoi jaboIi.
Eng – God will give him in the hospital.

Destiny

Na-jan-u mur kopal-ot ki likh-I thoi-s-e
Neg-know-1p I-gen forehead-loc what write-NF keep-pres-3p
Don't know what (he) has written for me.

It is believed in the culture that everything happening in our lives is because of our destiny. The destiny is already written. "kopal" (forehead) is used as the metaphor of destiny or luck.

Knowledge

Sualijonik porh-at bor log dise.
Girl-cl-acc study-loc very company give-pres-3p
The girl is good in studies.
"saraswati Devi " is known as the goddess of knowledge in

Hindu. The example shows that someone is praising the girl's talent and saying that the Saraswati Devi is with her.

Punishment

Muk kihor dukhor eman hasti dise?
I-acc which fault-poss so much punishment give-pres-3p
For which faults of mine (he) is giving me punishment?

Use of second person pronoun in direct speech and confession

Hokolubur thik kor-i diba aru.

All right do-NF give-2p and.

Eng -Please make all things right.

In this example, the person is praying to God, he is using direct speech to express his wish. Therefore, the agreement marker is in the second person. “(tumi) hokolubur thik kori diba”; the second person pronoun “tumi” is dropped in the sentence. The inflection in the verb “a” indicates that the subject is in the second person.

Muk ki pap-or hasti disa?

I-acc what sin-poss Punishment give-pres-2p?

For which sin (you) are giving me so much pain?

Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to show the use of third person pronoun as divine pronouns in Assamese. It has been found out that Assamese divine pronouns are mostly third person pronouns. While using direct speech to God, second person pronoun also can be used. The structure of the language indicates many things about the culture. There are different beliefs on natural causes, life and death, knowledge etc which have been identified by the structure of the language. It has been found out that these religious beliefs are more common among old generation.

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