

The Nuance of Emphasis: Exploring Pleonastic Suffixes in Assamese

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Abstract

Every language possesses a unique system for constructing meaning. Assamese, the easternmost Indo-Aryan language and Assam's official tongue, exemplifies this with its rich morphological system. Suffixes, attached to word ends, significantly impact meaning and emotional weight. This study delves into a fascinating subset: pleonastic suffixes. Unlike others, these add emphasis and emotional depth without altering core meaning. Their versatility allows them to express a range of emotions in everyday speech. Their frequent use reflects the nuanced expressiveness inherent in Assamese. To illuminate these multifaceted functions, a corpus-based approach will be employed. A comprehensive corpus of spoken Assamese, compiled from interviews, documentaries, and everyday conversations, will be analysed using established corpus techniques to identify instances of pleonastic suffixes. Following this, a qualitative analysis using thematic and discourse analysis will delve deeper, examining context, conveyed emotions, and the overall impact on the message. This exploration of the pleonastic suffixes will further help in gaining a deeper appreciation for Assamese morphology. These seemingly small additions significantly enhance the language's emotional depth and communicative power. This research paper, will not only contribute to a better understanding of Assamese grammar but also sheds light on the role of morphology in shaping emotional expression across languages.

Keywords: Pleonastic suffixes, Spoken Assamese, Corpus study, Morphology, Emotional expression, Assamese grammar.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Assamese (Asomiya), a vibrant language spoken by approximately 13 million people, serves as the cornerstone of Assamese identity and the official language of the state of Assam. Its roots lie in the fertile ground of Magadhi Apabhramsha, a Middle Indo-Aryan language that also gave rise to Bengali and Oriya. This shared ancestry positions Assamese within the Eastern group of Indo-Aryan languages.

The influence of Assamese extends beyond the borders of Assam. It functions as a vital lingua franca, fostering communication and cultural exchange among the diverse speech communities of the Northeast region. Notably, in Nagaland, a dialect known as Nagamese has emerged, and similar Assamese-influenced dialects are spoken in parts of Arunachal Pradesh (Nefamese or Arunamese). This eastward expansion of Aryan speech, originating from North Bihar and Bengal, found a fertile home in the Brahmaputra Valley, shaping the unique linguistic landscape of Assam.

Beyond its historical significance, Assamese boasts a rich and complex morphology, where suffixes

play a crucial role in word formation and imbue words with nuanced emotional weight. This is particularly evident in the use of pleonastic suffixes, which add emphasis and emotional depth without altering the core meaning of a sentence

2. METHODOLOGY- Capturing nuance through Observation and Interviews

This research delves into the nuanced world of pleonastic suffixes in spoken Assamese by employing a qualitative approach that prioritizes lived experience. To capture the organic use of these suffixes in various emotional contexts, the primary source of data will be natural conversations observed in real-world settings. This includes observing informal interactions like gossiping and everyday discussions among friends, arguments, and informal debates. Additionally, focused observation will be conducted in settings known for heightened emotions, such as marketplaces, sporting events, or community gatherings. This allows for insights into how pleonastic suffixes are used to emphasize specific feelings like excitement, frustration, or bargaining tactics.

Further enriching the data collection, semi-structured interviews will be conducted with native Assamese speakers from diverse backgrounds. These interviews aim to elicit concrete examples of pleonastic suffixes used in everyday situations. They will also explore participants' own understanding and perception of these suffixes, including the emotional emphasis conveyed and any cultural nuances associated with their use. Additionally, the interviews will help identify regional variations or social factors influencing the use of pleonastic suffixes.

3. Pleonastic suffixes in Assamese:

Pleonastic suffixes are a cornerstone feature of spoken Assamese, adding layers of emotional depth and nuance to everyday communication (Morol, 1974). Unlike regular suffixes that alter grammatical function or meaning (e.g., "-ing", in English, for present participle), pleonastic suffixes operate on a different level. As Jeremy Butterfield defines it, pleonasm refers to the use of "words or expressions that are unnecessary for the conveying of the literal meaning" ([Butterfield, 2015], p. 132). In the context of Assamese, these seemingly "extra" morphemes, the pleonastic suffixes, don't change the core meaning of the sentence but rather amplify the emotional weight.

The vast repertoire of the pleonastic suffixes in Assamese allows for a wide range of expressions, from a gentle plea to simmering anger. This ability to express subtle emotional variations through these seemingly redundant elements is what makes pleonastic suffixes so captivating. These suffixes, with their historical roots tracing back to the Medieval Period (Morol, 1974), typically follow the root word rather than adjectives.

Their frequent use reflects the inherent expressiveness of spoken Assamese, allowing speakers to communicate not only the literal meaning but also the emotional subtext behind their words.

The richness of Assamese is further amplified by its extensive inventory of pleonastic suffixes. The vast array includes /ei/, /sun/, /de/, /dei/, /ahi/, /hi/, /he/, all adding subtle variations in emphasis, urgency, or even exasperation, depending on the context. Suffixes like /dekhun/, /hobola/, /ke/, and /tu/ further broaden the spectrum of emotions conveyed. The list doesn't end there, with /pai/ and /aka/ also playing their part in enriching spoken Assamese.

Pleonastic suffixes that are used in Assamese are discussed below:

I. *gɔi*:

The /*gɔi*/ suffix is one of the most common pleonastic suffixes in Assamese. While /*gɔi*/ functions as an independent infinite verb in the language, it can also take on the role of a suffix attached to other verbs. When added to a verb, /*gɔi*/ expresses the nuance of a completed action that has occurred somewhere else, separate from the speaker's current location. This grammatical feature is specific to the present perfect tense and, interestingly, doesn't significantly alter the core meaning of the sentence itself.

This suffix offers a subtle but useful layer of information in Assamese conversations. It allows speakers to pinpoint the location of a completed action without needing a separate adverbial phrase. It's a fascinating example of how grammatical elements can shape the way a language conveys ideas.

i.	tai She-NOM 'She has eaten rice'	b ^h at rice	k ^h a-le-gɔi eat-PRES.PERF-PLE
ii.	tai She-NOM 'She has eaten rice'	b ^h at rice	k ^h a-le eat-PRES.PERF
iii.	Ram Ram-NOM 'Ram has reached Silchar'	silsɔr silchar	pa-le-gɔi reach-PRES.PERF-PLE
iv.	Ram Ram-NOM 'Ram has reached Silchar'	silsɔr Silchar	pal-e reach-PRES.PERF
v.	hi He-NOM 'He has sat in the classroom'	srenikut ^h a-t classroom-LOC	bɔhil-e-gɔi sit-PRES.PERF-PLE
vi.	hi He-NOM 'He has sat in the classroom'	srenikut ^h a-t classroom-LOC	bɔhil-e sit-PRES.PERF

The analysis of the given examples indicates that certain sentences (specifically, ii, iv, and vi) represent the original statements, while others (i, iii, and v) feature the addition of a pleonastic suffix. This suffix, denoted as /goi/, is appended to the verbs *k^hale*, *pale*, and *bohile*. Interestingly, upon adding this suffix, the verbs convey a sense of the action being completed at a location distinct from the speaker's current position. However, it's crucial to note that despite this addition, the core meaning of the sentences remains unaltered. In essence, the inclusion of the pleonastic suffix serves to subtly emphasize the completion of the action elsewhere without fundamentally changing the intended message conveyed by the sentences.

II. *hi* or *ahi*:

The Assamese language boasts a rich tapestry of grammatical tools, and the morpheme /hi/ adds another interesting thread to this weave. Stemming from the infinitive verb "ahi," which translates to "to come,"

i.	mɔi I-NOM 'I have eaten rice'	b ^h at rice	k ^h a-lu-hi eat-PRES.PERF-PLE
ii.	mɔi I-NOM 'I have eaten rice'	b ^h at rice	k ^h a-lu eat-PRES.PERF
iii.	rajib Rajib-NOM 'Rajib has arrived home'	g ^h or home	pa-le-hi arrive-PRES.PERF-PLE
iv.	rajib Rajib-NOM 'Rajib has arrived home'	g ^h or home	pa-le arrive-PRES.PERF

In examples i and iii, the pleonastic suffix /hi/ is appended to the verbs /khalu/ and /pale/, respectively. This addition signifies that the action denoted by the verbs has been completed at the current location after the subject's arrival from elsewhere. However, despite the inclusion of the pleonastic suffix, the core meaning of the sentences (as demonstrated in examples ii and iv) remains unchanged.

III. *nu*:

Among the versatile grammatical elements that the Assamese language is replete with, and one such ubiquitous suffix is /nu/, which serves as a prominent pleonastic marker. Upon addition, it imbues sentences

i.	mɔi-nu I-NOM-PLE 'Why should I go?'	kio why	jam? go-FUT
ii.	mɔi I-NOM 'Why should I go?'	kio why	jam? go-FUT

/hi/ assumes the role of a pleonastic suffix primarily utilized in casual discourse. Its addition to sentences introduces a nuanced dimension, particularly accentuating the temporal and spatial aspects of actions.

When appended to a verb, the presence of /hi/ signifies not only the recent completion of an action but also denotes that the subject has just arrived at the location where the action transpired. This subtle suffix serves to underscore the immediacy of the action upon the subject's arrival, effectively delineating the temporal and spatial context of the event.

In informal conversations, the inclusion of /hi/ injects vitality into the dialogue, providing a means to articulate the speaker's immediate presence at the scene of a freshly concluded action. It serves as a captivating exemplification of how seemingly minor grammatical components can wield substantial influence over the conveyance of meaning within a language's framework.

with a sense of emphasis, amplifying the intended message. Remarkably, /nu/ exhibits flexibility in its application, as it can be affixed to various word classes including nouns, pronouns, and verbs.

Beyond its role in emphasizing statements, /nu/ occasionally conveys nuances of excitement or irritation, depending on the context in which it is used. This multifaceted morpheme adds depth and intensity to communication, allowing speakers to convey their emotions and intentions with precision. Its widespread usage underscores its significance as a fundamental aspect of the Assamese linguistic landscape.

iii.	tumi You-NOM 'How did you go?'	keneke how	gola-nu? go-PRES.PERF-PLE
iv.	tumi You-NOM 'How did you go?'	keneke how	gola? go-PRES.PERF
v.	hi He-NOM 'Where will he go?'	kot-nu where-PLE	ja-bo? go-FUT
vi.	hi He-NOM 'Where will he go?'	kot where	ja-bo? go-FUT

The provided examples illustrate that the suffix /nu/ serves to emphasize the specific word to which it is appended, as evidenced by sentences i, iii, and v. Importantly, this emphasis does not alter the fundamental meaning conveyed by the original sentences (ii, iv, and vi). While /nu/ is commonly associated with interrogative sentences, exceptions exist, as demonstrated in examples vii and ix. This versatile suffix thus plays a pivotal role in highlighting key elements within sentences, contributing to the nuanced expression of meaning in the Assamese language.

i.	tumi You-NOM 'You do the work' (Politely)	kamtu work-CL	korana do-PLE
ii.	tumi You-NOM 'You do the work' (order)	kamtu work-CL	kora do
iii.	tai You-NOM (inferior) 'You go from here' (request)	iyar-pora here-from	ja-na go-PLE
iv.	tai You-NOM (inferior) 'You go from here' (rudely, order)	iyar-pora here-from	ja go

From the examples provided, it's evident that in sentences i and iii, the addition of the pleonastic suffix alters the structure or expression of the sentences, but it does not fundamentally change their underlying meanings. This observation suggests that while the inclusion of the pleonastic suffix may introduce variations in how a sentence is phrased or perceived, it does not lead to a shift in the core message or intention conveyed by the original sentences.

i.	tumi You-NOM 'You should come tomorrow' (Requesting)	kai-lai tomorrow	ahi-ba-sun come-FUT-PLE
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IV. *na* :

The morpheme /na/ in the Assamese language serves multiple functions, including indicating requests, expressing politeness, and similar sentiments, all while preserving the original meaning of the sentences in which it appears. Interestingly, /na/ is typically utilized by younger individuals and among friends, as opposed to being employed by the elderly. It is exclusively attached to verbs and directed towards the second person. This linguistic nuance underscores the role of /na/ in interpersonal communication, where it enhances expressions of courtesy and consideration without altering the core message being conveyed.

V. *sun*:

The morpheme /sun/ holds significance in the Assamese language, as it conveys feelings of wonder, requests, and similar sentiments. Its versatility is notable, as it can be attached to various parts of speech including nouns, pronouns, and verbs. Importantly, the use of /sun/ is observed in Modern Assamese, reflecting its continued relevance and integration within contemporary linguistic practices.

- ii. tumi kailoi ahiba
You-NOM tomorrow come-FUT
'Come tomorrow' (order)
- iii. moisun ekuke najanu
I-NOM-PLE anything NEG-know
'I do not know anything' (wonder)
- iv. moi ekuke najanu
I-NOM anything NEG-know
'I do not know anything'

In the examples provided, namely i and iii, the pleonastic suffix '-sun' attaches itself either with the subject or the verb, thereby imbuing the sentences with a sense of wonder, requests, or similar sentiments. This attachment serves to intensify the expression, adding emphasis or emotion to the statement. In contrast, this intensification or emotional emphasis is not present in the counterparts, ii and iv. Thus, the inclusion of '-sun' in examples i and iii enhances the overall tone and conveys a heightened sense of wonder or urgency, distinguishing them from their counterparts.

- i. tumi bhal-koi jua-dei
You-NOM good-ADV go-PLE
'You should go carefully' (politely)
- ii. tumi bhal-koi jua
You-NOM good-ADV go
'Go carefully' (advice)
- iii. kam-tu kori-lua-dei
Work-CL do-take-PLE
'Do the work' (politely)
- iv. kam-tu kori-lua
Work-CL do-take
'Do the work' (order)

In the examples provided, i and iii demonstrate the usage of the pleonastic suffix '-dei' attached to the verbs, which indeed imparts a sense of politeness or affection, especially when addressing younger individuals or those with whom one shares a close relationship. However, this heightened emotional tone is notably absent in the counterparts ii and iv. Thus, the inclusion of '-dei' in examples i and iii serves to intensify the expression, conveying a warmer or more considerate sentiment compared to their counterparts.

VII. he-

The pleonastic suffix '-he' holds a multifaceted role within the Assamese language, offering a means to accentuate emotions and emphasize specific elements of

- i. tumi ki koi-asa-he?
You-NOM what say-CONT-PLE
'What are you saying?' (Wondered, irritated)

VI. de/dei :

The morpheme /de/ or /dei/ originates from the Assamese word /dia/, which translates to "give." When used, it imparts a sense of politeness or affection, particularly when addressing younger individuals. Additionally, /de/ or /dei/ carries the connotation of "alright" in a broader sense within the language. As one of the most prevalent pleonastic suffixes in Assamese, its usage is widespread and ingrained in everyday communication.

speech. Primarily, when appended to a word, '-he' serves as a tool for emphasis, amplifying the significance or intensity of the conveyed message. This heightened emphasis can manifest in various emotions, ranging from wonder and admiration to irritation or frustration, depending on the context in which it is employed.

Furthermore, '-he' is deeply ingrained in Assamese discourse as a common pleonastic suffix, frequently observed in everyday conversations and written communication. Its versatility allows it to be appended to various parts of speech, including nouns, verbs, and adjectives, enabling speakers to tailor their expressions according to the desired emotional tone or emphasis.

- ii. tumi ki koi-asa?
You-NOM what say-CONT
'What are you saying?'
- iii. mɔi-he jam
I-NOM-PLE go-FUT
'I shall go' (more emphasized)
- iv. mɔi jam
I-NOM go-FUT
'I shall go'

In the provided examples, the suffix '-he' is affixed to both the verb and the subject in sentences i and iii, effectively enhancing the emphasis and intensity of the conveyed message. This addition imbues the statements with a heightened sense of significance or emotion. However, in counterparts ii and iv, this intensification is notably absent, resulting in a comparatively less emphatic expression. Thus, the inclusion of '-he' in sentences i and iii serves to augment the impact of the conveyed message, distinguishing them from their counterparts.

- i. ram-ei nissoi kam-tu kor-ise
Ram-NOM-PLE sure work-CL do-PRES.PERF
'Ram has done the work for sure' (more emphasis on Ram)
- ii. ram nissoi kamtu kor-ise
Ram-NOM sure work-CL do-PRES.PERF
'Ram has done the work for sure'
- iii. mɔi kam kor-i-ei-asu
I-NOM work do-PLE-CONT
'I am doing the work' (more emphasis on 'do')
- iv. mɔi kam kor-i-asu
I-NOM work do-CONT
'I am doing work'

In examples i and iii, we observe the morpheme /ei/ attached to the subject (noun), illustrating its role in intensifying emphasis within the sentence structure. This augmentation serves to elevate the significance and emotional resonance of the conveyed message, adding depth and emphasis to the subject's role in the statement.

Conversely, in examples ii and iv, the absence of /ei/ results in a comparatively muted expression, lacking the intensified emphasis characteristic of its presence. Without this pleonastic suffix, the statements may appear less impactful or emotionally charged, as they lack the heightened sense of significance conveyed by the presence of /ei/.

4. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The study delves into the intricate world of pleonastic suffixes in Assamese, revealing their diverse usage and nuanced impact on communication. Across a

VIII. ei:

The morpheme /ei/ plays a crucial role in enhancing emphasis within the Assamese language. As a highly productive pleonastic suffix, it can be applied across various parts of speech, including nouns, pronouns, and verbs. Its primary function is to intensify emphasis, thereby augmenting the impact and significance of the conveyed message. This versatility allows speakers to strategically employ /ei/ to underscore key elements within sentences, effectively heightening the overall tone and emotional resonance of their communication, as demonstrated below.

range of suffixes including /goi/, /hi/, /nu/, /sun/, /dei/, /he/, and /ei/, the findings illuminate their role in intensifying emphasis and emotional expression without altering the fundamental meaning of sentences. From conveying politeness and affection to expressing wonder or frustration, these suffixes add layers of emotional depth to everyday discourse. Moreover, the study highlights the cultural and social significance of pleonastic suffixes, showcasing their role in reflecting cultural norms and social dynamics within Assamese-speaking communities. While regional and temporal variations may influence their usage, the effectiveness of these suffixes ultimately hinges on context, speaker intention, and situational dynamics. Overall, the study underscores the richness and complexity of pleonastic suffixes in Assamese, shedding light on their integral role in shaping communication and expressing emotions within the linguistic landscape of Assam.

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

In conclusion, the exploration of pleonastic suffixes in Assamese unveils a fascinating aspect of the language's richness and complexity. Through the analysis of various suffixes, it becomes evident that these linguistic elements play a crucial role in intensifying emphasis and imbuing communication with nuanced emotional expression. From emphasizing completed actions to conveying politeness or affection, pleonastic suffixes serve as powerful tools for enhancing communication and reflecting cultural norms within Assamese-speaking communities. Moreover, the study underscores the importance of context and situational dynamics in shaping the effectiveness of these suffixes, highlighting their versatility and adaptability to diverse communicative settings. As Assamese continues to evolve and thrive, the continued exploration of pleonastic suffixes offers valuable insights into the intricate interplay between language, culture, and emotion within the vibrant linguistic landscape of Assam.

Appendix: List of Abbreviations

ADV- Adverb
 CL- Classifier
 CONT- Continuous
 FUT- Future
 LOC- Locative
 NOM- Nominative
 NEG- Negative
 PRES.INDF- Present Indefinite
 PLE- Pleonastic
 PRES.PERF- Present perfect

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