

## **The Morphology of Person, Number, and Gender in Maram**

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper attempts to discuss person, number, and gender in Maram. Maram (ISO 639-3 nma) belongs to the Western Naga group under the Tibeto-Burman language family (Mark Post and Burling, 2017) spoken by 37,300 speakers in the Senapati district of Manipur in Northeast India. In Maram, there are three persons: first person i 'I', second person naŋ 'you', and third person "pau 'he/she'. Maram has three numbers: singular, dual, and plural. There is no grammatical agreement in number. Like other Tibeto-Burman languages, Maram does not possess grammatical gender.

It is found that Maram has three persons i.e., i 'I', naŋ 'you', and "pau 'he/she'. In Maram, singular is marked by the numeral 'one' huŋninə, dual is marked by 'naina' and 'bəna', and for the plural, there is no marker, and the quantifier haŋ 'which means all' is used. In Maram, gender is marked based on the natural distinction of sex. For animate nouns, Maram has lexical differences and there is also another morphological process called prefixation and suffixation. And for inanimate nouns 'lə', 'gaŋ', "daŋ', and 'araŋ' are marked masculine, and 'pui', and 'ahui' are marked feminine.

**KEYWORDS:** Maram, Tibeto-Burman, Person, Number, Gender.

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Maram (ISO 639-3 nma) is a Tibeto-Burman language spoken by 37,300 speakers in the Senapati district of Manipur in North-Eastern India<sup>1</sup>. Maram belongs to the Western Naga group under the Tibeto-Burman language family (Mark Post and Burling, 2017)<sup>2</sup>. The word Maram refers to the language, people, and place. According to the UNESCO Endangerment Index Maram language is marked as a '**venerable**' language. It has close affinities with Liangmai, Zeme, and Rongmei. In Maram, there are three persons: first, second, and third, and numbers: singular, dual, and plural. Grammatical gender is absent in this language.

### **II. GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION**

The Marams reside in more than fifty villages spread throughout the geographical expanse generally recognized as the Maram area. Marams are encircled by various Naga tribes; to the North by Mao Nagas, to the East by Poumai Nagas, to the South by the Thangal and the Kukis, and to the West and South West by Zeliangrong

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.Censusindia2011.com/Manipur/Senapati/Mao-Maram-Population.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/282662694>.

(Zeme, Liangmai, and Rongmei). Marams resides only in the Senapati district. According to the 2011 Census report, there are 37,300 speakers and the total number of Maram females is 18,477 and males 18823<sup>3</sup>.

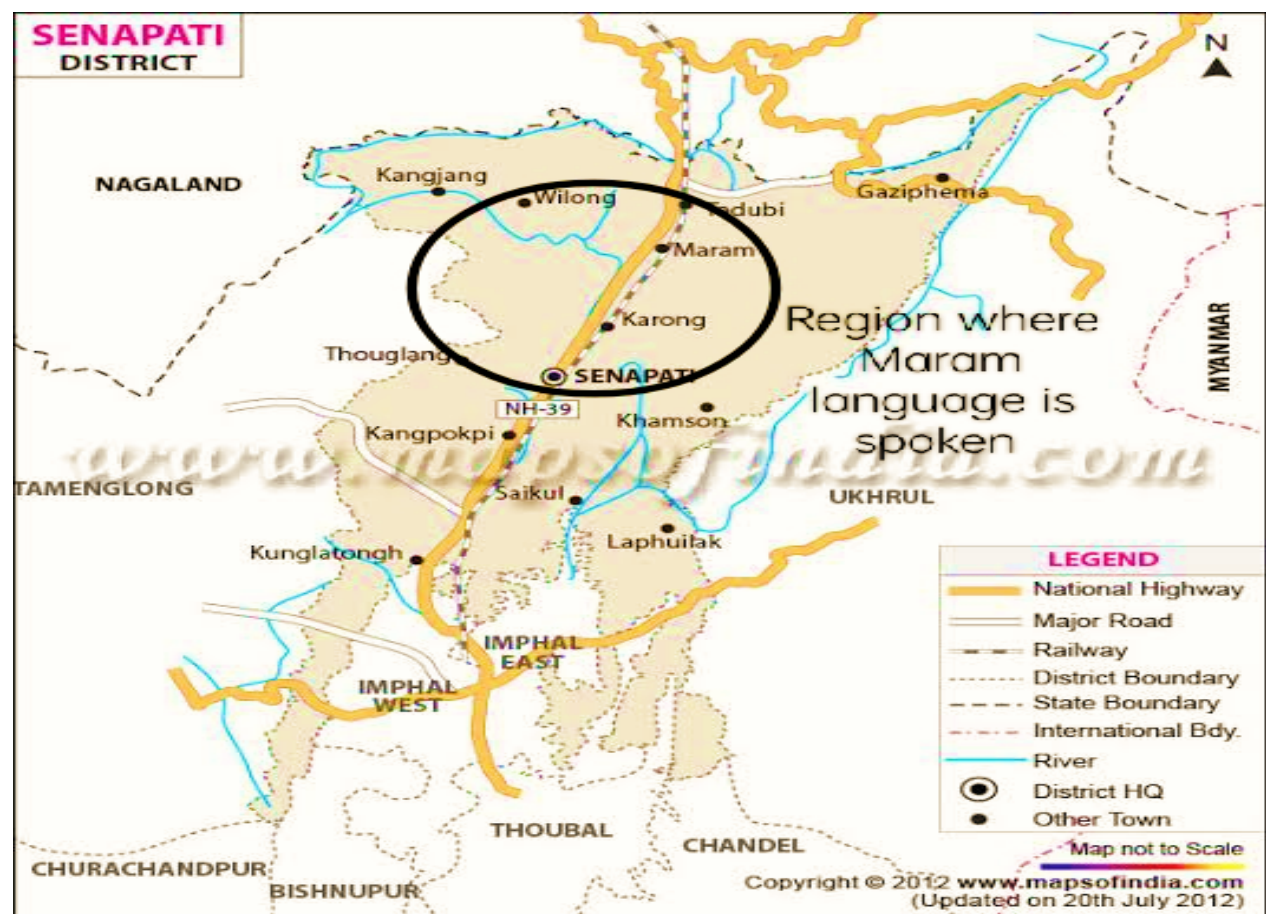


Figure 1. Map of Senapati district<sup>4</sup>.

### III. LANGUAGE CLASSIFICATION

Grierson (1904) categorized Maram under Kuki-Chin and other scholars viz. Bradley (1997), Burling (2003), and Mark Post and Burling (2017) have placed Maram under the Western Naga group<sup>5</sup>. The genetic classification of Naga languages by Mark Post and Burling, 2017 is given in Figure 1.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.Censusindia2011.com/Manipur/Senapati/Mao-Maram-Population.html>

<sup>4</sup> <https://images.app.goo.gl/FuFc6fVsYmUn2VXg7>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/282662694>

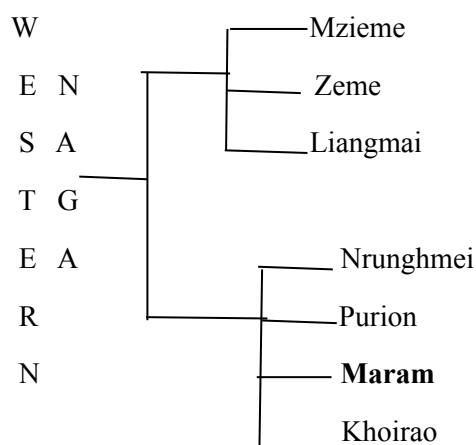


Figure 1. Genetic classification of Naga languages (Mark Post and Burling 2017)<sup>6</sup>.

#### IV. LITERATURE REVIEW

Marams has limited books with only a handful of notable works.

‘*Kamatei lii*’, the pioneering Maram hymnal, was published in 1964 by the Maram Naga Baptist Association. Since then, it has undergone revisions, the latest being the 5<sup>th</sup> edition released in 2019.

‘*Karanu kabi samtam* (New Testament) was published in 1995 by The Bible Society of India. Meanwhile, work is in progress to translate the Old Testament into Maram language.

The Maram Literature Society published a series of Maram language textbooks in 2021. “*Marammei Lat Bung*” covers classes 1-8, while separate books on *Marammei Latlii (Maram Grammar)*, *Maram Literature book*, and *Maram Coursebook* are available for classes 9-10.

The Maram Literature Society first published “*The Maram-English (Dictionary)*” in 2021, marking a significant milestone in the preservation and promotion of the Maram language.

Joseph Atthical (1992) wrote about the Maram in his book *Maram Nagas, a socio-cultural Study*. The book furnishes the historical background of the Maram tribe. The tribe’s heritage ancestors and geographical distribution are mentioned in the book.

Peter Ki in his blog <https://infomaramwordpress.com> gives a brief outline of the Maram tribe. The blog contains about the people of Maram, rituals, festivals, folk songs, folk tales, etc.

Th. Robert Tiba’s 2013 publication, “*History and Culture of the Maram; A Reconstruction from Oral and Folklore Tradition*”, delves into the origin, migration, cultural life, and religion of the Maram people.

#### V. METHODOLOGY

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/282662694>. DOI:10.4324.9781315399508.

The primary data was collected from Kavanam village and Willong Khullen village which are in the Northern and Western parts of Maram, respectively. It was collected through the method of linguistics fieldwork from the native speakers. The questionnaire is based on Anvita Abbi's "A Manual of Linguistics Field Work" for the secondary sources data is collected from books, blogs, etc. For the analysis, 500 words and 150 sentences are collected from the informants.

## VI. PERSONAL PRONOUNS IN MARAM

Person. 'First person' refers to the speaker, 'Second person' refers to the hearer, First, and second persons are sometimes collectively referred to as speech act participants, 'Third person' usually refers to any non-speech act participant. (Thomas Payne 2007:45). Person is "A category used in grammatical description to indicate the number and nature of the participant in a situation". (David Crystal 2008:358). Maram has a three-way distinction for person: first person, second person, and third person. The examples of personal pronouns are in the table 1.

Perso n	Singular		Plural	
1 <i>i</i>		'I'	<i>ni</i>	'we'
2	<i>naŋ</i>	'you'	<i>naŋ</i>	'you'
3	<i><sup>m</sup>pau</i>	'she/he',	<i><sup>m</sup>paumai</i>	'they',

**Table 1. Personal Pronouns (Subject pronoun)**

For the objective form *-go* is added to the subjective form. In the first person, *i* is changed into *ŋ*, in the second person *naŋ* is changed into *ŋ*, and in the third person the object form remains as it is in the subject form. There are some differences in tones in the first-person object pronoun the tone is high but in the second and third person, the tones are mid. The examples of object pronouns are in Table 2.

Person	Object pronoun	
First person	<i>ŋ-go<sup>ó</sup></i>	'me'
Second person	<i>ŋ-go<sup>o</sup></i>	'you'
Third person	<i><sup>m</sup>paumai-go<sup>o</sup></i>	'them',

**Table 2. Object Pronouns**

The sentences (1) to (4) show the personal pronouns in Maram.

### First person

1. *i- nə*            *tak*    *t<sup>h</sup>ə-ta-le*  
       1SG NOM        rice    eat-PERF-DECL

‘I have taken my meal’.

2. *naŋ nə tak tʰə-ta-le*  
 2SG NOM rice eat-PERF-DECL  
 ‘You have taken the meal’.

3. *ˀpau nə tak tʰə-ta-le*  
 3PL NOM rice eat-PERF-DECL  
 ‘She/he has taken the meal’.

4. *ni nə ˀgoˀ luŋsi-le*  
 3PL NOM you love-DECL  
 ‘We love you’.

Maram features a threefold classification of grammatical person, comprising first person (the speaker), second person (the addressee), and third person (the person or thing being referred to). In Maram, the object pronoun is from by adding "-go" to the subjective form. However, there are specific changes for each person: First person: "i" becomes "ŋ" and has a high tone. Second person: "naŋ" becomes "ŋ" with a mid-tone. Third person: remains the same as the subjective form, with a mid-tone. These changes result in distinct forms and tones for each grammatical person.

## VI. NUMBER

Number is “a grammatical category used for the analysis of word classes displaying such contrasts as singular (sg, SG, sing), plural (pl, PL), dual (du) (‘two’), trial (‘three’), paucal (‘few’), etc.,” (David Crystal 2008:335). In Maram, singularity is marked with the numeral number one *haŋninə*. In duality, it is marked by *-naina*, *-bəna*, and *paina*, and for the plurality *-ni*, and *-mai* are the markers. The dual is formed by combining a sequence - *naina*, *-bəna*, and *painə* representing a frozen form where *-na* is the root for ‘two’, *-nai* is the root word for ‘and’, and *-bə* and *-pai* is the root for gender marker for male and female, respectively. Other formal distinctions, such as ‘inclusive’ and ‘exclusive’ are absent in the language. The examples of numbers are given in Table 3.

**Table 3. Number**

Person	Singular		Dual		Plural	
	Maram	Gloss	Maram	Gloss	Maram	Gloss
1	<i>i</i>	‘I’	<i>naina</i>	‘we two’	<i>(ai) ni</i>	‘we’
2	<i>naŋ</i>	‘you’	<i>u-naina</i>	‘you two’	<i>u-ni</i>	‘you all’
3	<i>ˀpau</i>	‘she/he’	<i>ˀpaubəna</i> (M) <i>ˀpaupaina</i> (F)	‘we two’ ‘we two’	<i>ˀpaumai</i>	‘they’

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Examples (5) to (14) show the numbers in singular, dual, and plural forms.

### First-person

5. *i-nə ri-ta-le*  
1SG-NOM late-PERF-DECL  
'I am late'.

6. *əpiek haŋninə sai-lo*  
cup one give-IMP  
'Give me a cup'.

7. *naina-nə ri-ta-le*  
1DL NOM late-PERF-DECL  
'We (two) are late'.

8. *(ai)ni-nə ri-ta-le*  
1PL NOM late-PERF-DECL  
'We are late'.

### Second person

9. *naŋ-nə ri-ta-le*  
2DL NOM late-PERF-DECL  
'You are late'.

10. *unaina-nə ri-ta-le*  
2DL NOM late-PERF-DECL  
'You two are late'.

11. *uni-nə ri-ta-le*  
2PL NOM late-PERF-DECL  
'You all are late'.

### Third person

12. *<sup>m</sup>pau-nə ri-ta-le*  
3SG NOM late-PERF-DECL  
'She/he is late'.

13. *<sup>m</sup>paupaina-nə ri-ta-le*  
3PL NOM late-PERF-DECL  
'They two are late'.

14. *<sup>m</sup>paumai-nə ri-ta-le*  
3PL NOM late-PERF-DECL  
'They are late'.

In Maram, number is marked through the process of suffixation. Singularity is indicated by the numeral *haŋninə* "one". Duality is marked by *-naina*, *-bəna*, and *-paina*, which are frozen forms combining roots for *na* is "two", *nai* is "and", and *bə* and *pai* are gender markers, male and female, respectively. Plurality is marked differently for each person: the first person uses the lexical word *-ni*, the second person adds *-ni* to *u-*, and the third person

adds *-mai* to the third-person singular. Interestingly, the root word *mai* originally meant "people". Furthermore, the language lacks formal distinctions for inclusivity and exclusivity.

## VII. GENDER

Gender is a grammatical category used for the analysis of word-classes displaying such contrast as masculine (m, masc, MASC), feminine (f, F, fem, FEM), and neuter (n, neut, NEUT), animate and inanimate, etc. (David Crystal 2008: 206). In Maram, there is no grammatical gender but it is determined by natural gender i.e., all the female comes under the feminine and all the male comes under the masculine. In other words, gender distinction is determined by the natural recognition of sex. Maram language shared the typological features of the Tibeto-Burman language, characterized by the absence of grammatical gender.

Nouns in the language are categorized into animate and inanimate. Animate nouns are further divided into human and non-human, with human nouns being distinguished as either masculine or feminine. Similarly, non-human animate nouns also exhibit a masculine-feminine distinction. In contrast, inanimate nouns do not exhibit any gender-based distinction.

### Human nouns

Human nouns exhibit lexical differences, as illustrated in the table. The examples are in Table 4.

**Table 4. Human nouns with lexical difference**

Generic term		Male		Female	
Maram	Gloss	Maram	Gloss	Maram	Gloss
<i>amai</i>	‘human’	<i>safəma</i> <i>i</i>	‘male’	<i>sapuima</i> <i>i</i>	‘female’
<i>puifə</i>	‘parents’	<i>afə</i>	‘father’	<i>apui</i>	‘mother’
-----	-----	<i>ana</i>	‘husband’ <i>anau</i>		‘wife’

Notably, gender marking in human nouns is achieved through prefixation, where specific prefixes are added to indicate gender. The examples are in Table 5.

**Table 5. Human nouns prefixation process**

Generic term		Male		Female	
Maram	Gloss	Maram	Gloss	Maram	Gloss
<i>katiŋma</i> <i>i</i>	‘old people’	<i>paukatiŋma</i> <i>i</i>	‘old man’	<i>paikatiŋma</i> <i>i</i>	‘old woman’

Additionally, human nouns also undergo suffixation, another morphological process that modifies the noun form. The examples are in Table 6.

**Table 6. Human nouns suffixation process**

Generic term		Male		Female	
Maram	Gloss	Maram	Gloss	Maram	Gloss
<i>kadakmai</i>	‘weaver’	<i>paikadakbə(pə)</i>	<i>paikadakbə(pə)</i>	<i>paikadakpai</i>	‘female weaver’
<i>karəlimai</i>	‘teacher’	<i>karəlimaibə(pə)</i>	‘male teacher’	<i>karəlimaipa</i>	‘female teacher’
<i>rakazuma</i>	‘doctor’	<i>rakazubə (pə)</i>	‘male doctor’	<i>rakazupai</i>	‘female doctor’

Non-

#### Human Animate nouns

For animate non-human nouns, the masculine gender is marked by suffixing either */-lə, -daŋ, and -raŋ/*, and feminine genders are marked by suffixing the feminine marker */-pui/* and it denotes more of motherhood than the feminine gender as shown in Table 7.

**Table 7. Non-Human Animate nouns**

Generic term		Male		Female	
Mara	Gloss	Maram	Gloss	Mara	Gloss
<i>afə</i>	‘dog’	<i>afələ</i>	‘dog’	<i>afəpui</i>	‘bitch’
<i>atum</i>	‘cow’	<i>tum"daŋ</i>	‘bull’	<i>tumpui</i>	‘cow’
<i>abak</i>	‘pig’	<i>abakara</i>	‘sows’	<i>abakpu</i>	‘boars’

#### Birds

For the birds, masculine and feminine is marked only for chicken and duck the other are indicated by the generic term. The masculine markers are *-gaŋ* and *-araŋ* and the feminine marker is *-pui*. The examples are in the Table 8.

**Table 8. Bird**

Generic term		Male		Female	
Mara	Gloss	Maram	Gloss	Maram	Gloss
<i>m</i>					



<i>mipui</i>	‘duck’	<i>mipuiara</i> <i>ŋ</i>	‘drake’ ,	<i>mipuiahu</i> <i>i</i>	‘duck’ ,
<i>ary</i>	‘chicken’ ,	<i>arygay</i>	‘cock’	<i>arypui</i>	‘hen’

### Reptiles, fishes, insects, and inanimate nouns

In Maram reptiles, fishes, and insects’ gender is not marked. In the language of inanimate nouns, gender is not marked. The examples are in Table 9.

**Table 9. Nouns without gender**

<b>Maram</b>	<b>Gloss</b>	<b>Maram</b>	<b>Gloss</b>
<i>sanə</i>	‘snake’	<i>kui</i>	‘bee’
<i>sapuŋ</i>	‘elephant’	<i>ʔŋiŋ</i>	‘ants’
<i>sahi</i> ‘porcupine’		<i>sakə</i>	‘moon’
<i>agua</i>	‘frog’	<i>aka</i>	‘fish’

Gender distinctions are made through various morphological processes: Human nouns exhibit lexical differences, as well as prefixation and suffixation. Majority are lexical difference and suffixation while prefixation is limited. Non-human animate nouns use suffixation to mark gender, with "*lə*", "*daŋ*", "*araŋ*", and "*gay*" indicating masculinity, and "*pui*" and "*ahui*" indicating femininity. Reptiles do not have specific gender markers. Inanimate nouns do not have marked gender distinctions.

## VIII. CONCLUSION

Maram has three grammatical persons: first (speaker), second (listener), and third (person/thing referred to). To form object pronouns, "*-go*" is added, but with specific changes: First person: "*i*" becomes "*ŋ*" (high tone). Second person: "*naŋ*" becomes "*ŋ*" (mid-tone). Third person: remains unchanged (mid-tone). This creates unique forms and tones for each person.

In Maram, number is marked through the process of suffixation, singularity indicated by the numeral "one". Duality is marked by suffixes like *-naina*, *-bəna*, and *-paina*, which combine roots for "two", "and", and gender markers. Plurality is marked differently for each person: a first-person use *-ni*, the second person adds *-ni* to *u-*, and the third person adds *-mai*, derived from the root word "*mai*", originally meaning "people". Notably, Maram lacks formal distinctions for inclusivity and exclusivity.

In this language, gender is distinguished through various morphological processes: Human nouns have lexical differences as well as prefixation and suffixation. Non-human animate nouns: suffixation with specific markers (male: *lə*, *daŋ*, *araŋ*, *gay*; female: *pui*, *ahui*). Reptiles: no specific gender markers. Inanimate nouns: no marked gender distinctions. These processes reveal a complex system of gender marking, with varying levels of specificity across different noun categories.

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## ABBREVIATION

1SG – First person singular

2SG – Second person singular

NOM – Nominative

PERF – Perfective

DECL – Declarative

3PL – Third person Plural

M – Male

F – Female

1DL – First-person dual

2DL – Second-person dual

i - central vowel

ŋ – velar nasal

<sup>m</sup>p - pre-nasalized voiceless bilabial stop

ə - central, between half-open and half-close, neutral lip position

tʃ - voiceless affricative

<sup>n</sup>d – pre-nasalized voiced alveolar stop

ɤ - central vowel

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