4. **Use of Definitives and Classifiers in Assamese and Boro.**

4.1 **Definitives in Assamese.**

Assamese structurally maintains a distinction between the general use of nouns, such as /manuh/ 'man' in /manuh maranxil/ 'man is mortal' and the specific use of them such as /manuhzon/ 'the man' in /manuhzon mōril/ 'the man died'. The latter reference is resorted to when the noun reference is specifically known to both the speaker and the person spoken to, both had talked about it sometime before. In order to make a specific or particular reference to some nouns, Assamese uses some particles as morphemes to the nouns. The contrast of some nouns with and without these morphemes, could be seen in the following examples,

/aina/ 'mirror' (in general) but
/aina-khōn/ 'the mirror' (in particular)

/gas/ 'tree' (in general) but /gas-zopa/ 'the particular tree'
/rasi/ 'rope' (in general) but /rasi-dai/ 'the particular rope'

It is not possible to use the former set for the latter; we can’t say /mai edal gas ruisilō/ 'I planted a tree' */gas mōril/ 'the tree dead' because it is specific. Such morphemes like {-khōn}, {-zopa}, {-dal} etc. are known as definitives.

4.2 **The Classifier in Assamese.**

Some principal definitive-cum Classifiers are discussed below with
illustrations, it may be mentioned here that some of them are basically noun having independent use and meaning but used as definitives cum-classifiers. The classifiers are added with nouns, adjectives and numerals, moreover they are used after some pronouns accept first and second person indicator. These classifiers are morphologically conditioned. Some definitives-cum-classifiers which are added along with nouns, adjectives and numerals are such as;

/hat-kʰɔn/ 'the hand', /kɔpal-kʰɔn/ 'the forehead', /ei-kʰini/ 'this much' /xɔu-dal/ 'that one', /ɛ-ta/ 'one' /du-ta/ 'two'. After addition of inflectional suffixes the words would be as such /hat-kʰɔn-ɔr/ 'of the hand' /ɛ-ta-ɾ/ 'of the one' etc. In plural formation the same classifiers are added only {-kei} morpheme is added along with the stem such as /lɔra-kei-zɔn/ 'the boys', /kitap-kei-kʰɔn/ 'the book, Some definitives-cum-classifiers could be seen from the following examples;

4.2.1 {-azoli}

It is basically a noun referring to 'holding together the two palms'. It could be used after nouns that could be contained in two palms held together, /pɔni-azoli/ 'the quantity of water hold on two palms together. /dʰan-azoli/ 'the quantity of paddy hold on two palms together'.

4.2.2 {-akʰi}

It occurs to nouns that refer to bunches of bananas. /kɔl akʰi/ 'the bunch of banana'

4.2.3 {-pah}

It occurs with noun (particularly flower) in dimunitive sense.

4.2.4 {-kura}
It occurs with nouns particularly ‘fire’ in diminutive sense.

/zui-kura/ ‘the fire’

4.2.5 {-kosa}

It occur with nouns like bunches of key, tuft of hair etc.

/suli-kosa/ ‘the tuft of hair’

/sabi-kosa/ ‘the bunch of key’

4.2.6 {-khö} and smaller in size {-khöni}¹

Occur to indicate things like flat and wide, such as

/salöni-khö/ ‘the sieve’

/dari-khö/ ‘the mattress’

/nö-khö/ ‘the boat’

/könya-köni > (khöni)/ ‘the small daughter’

4.2.7 {-gyraki}

It occurs after masculine and feminine nouns indicating human beings to show respect or consideration

/mnuh-gyraki/ ‘the particular man or woman’

4.2.8 {-sota} and {-soti} in diminutive use.

Used after nouns indicating something long and flat, especially that has been split and made into strips.

4.2.9 {-zön} (masculine) and {-zöni}² (feminine)

Used after nouns, pronouns and numerals to indicate human beings;

E.g.

/manuh-zön/ ‘the man’

/tirotap-zöni/ ‘the woman’
4.2.10 {tār} in diminutive {tāri}

It indicates something long and lose tied into a bunch or bundle;

*e.g.*

/suli-tār/ ‘the bunch of hair’.

/barhāni-tār/ ‘the broom stick’

/barhāni-tāri/ ‘the small broom stick’

4.2.11 {pat}

It indicates something long, flat and narrow; *e.g.*

/bɔtha-pat/ ‘the oar’

/kār-pat/ ‘the arrow’

4.2.12 {phera}

Used after material nouns to indicate a small quantity; *e.g.*

/seni-phera/ ‘a small quantity of sugar’

/lon-phera/ ‘a small quantity of salt’

4.3 The Classifier or Definitives in Boro.

The numeral classifiers or numeral definitives form a fairly extensive class of morphemes which occur directly before one of the common quantifiers (1, 2, 3, 4 and 5) and they take one of principal nominal suffixes to form words. These have different aspects of meaning in relation to the nouns which precede the numeral formations. With a small number of nouns several different classifiers may be used depending upon the aspect of these nouns intended to be emphasized. For example, /owa-tʰose/ ‘a bamboo (undivided);

/owa-tʰonse/ ‘a piece of bamboo’/owa-subase/ ‘a cluster of bamboo’. The
following illustrations could be seen;

4.3.1 {bar-}

It is used for flowers in blooming stage; e.g.

/bibar-barse/ ‘a flower’

4.3.2 {dan-}

It is used for months; e.g.

/okʰapʰqrt dan-se/ ‘a (lunar) month’

4.3.3 {dor-}

It is used for pieces of meat, slices of fish, and the like, and also for plots of land, number of villages, kingdoms etc.; e.g.

/bedor dor-se/ ‘a piece of meat’

/hador dor-se/ ‘a plot of land’

4.3.4 {dan} It is used to determine a sheaf or a cluster of bananas, garlands, necklaces etc.; e.g.

/nalɛŋkʰɔr dan-braŋj ‘four clusters of coconut’

/mala dan-se/ ‘a garland’

4.3.5 {dəŋ-}

It is used for rope, hair, chain, thread, tail, creeper and similar inanimate long, soft or flexible things or materials; for example,

/durəŋ dəŋ-se/ ‘a rope’

/dəŋse lama/ ‘a road’

4.3.6 {dəj-}

It is used for eggs; e.g.

/bidəj dəj-ba/ ‘five eggs’
4.3.7 \{kh or-\}

It is used for holes, ponds, wells, canals, etc. e.g.

/hak\h^or k\h^or-se/ ‘a canal’

It is also used as nouns; such as

/d\h^or/ ‘well’ /hak\h^or/ ‘canal’

4.3.8 \{k\h^on-\}

It is used for shells of eggs, rinds of trees and fruits etc.; e.g.

/k\h^on\h^a bik\h^on/ ‘five rinds’

It is also used as noun; such as

/bik\h^on/ ‘shell’

4.3.9 \{go\h^e-\}

It is used for horns, sticks, wooden furniture, house, weapon, boat, ship, and similar inanimate hard and long things as well as instruments; e.g.

/no go\h^e\h^a/ ‘a house’, /nao go\h^e/ ‘a boat’

It is also used as free nouns; such as /go\h^e/ ‘horn’

4.3.10 \{ga\h^e-\}

It is used for leaves of trees, books, wings, pieces of cloth, paper and various flat things; e.g.

/bizab ga\h^e\h^a/ ‘a book’

/bilai ga\h^e\h^a/ ‘a leaf’

4.3.11 \{th aj-\}

It is used for fruits, rupees, teeth, stones, and similar round things; e.g.

/t\h^alir th aj\h^se/ ‘a banana’
4.3.12 {tho-}

It is used for undivided, log, cave etc. e.g.

/thakha thaj-se/ ‘a rupee’

/onthaj thaj-tham/ ‘three stones’

4.3.13 {ma-}

It is used for all species of animals, birds, insects and reptiles, also for ghosts and gods; e.g.

/khuser tho-naj/ ‘two sugar canes’

/owa tho-se/ ‘a bamboo’

4.3.14 {sa-}

It is used for all sorts of human beings except gods and ghosts; e.g.

/sa-se mansi/ ‘a man’

4.3.15 {mən-}

It is used for maximum number of inanimate things or articles in general, also used for abstract counting; e.g.

/mən-se mua/ ‘a thing something’

/duqima mən-se/ ‘a river’

4.4 Definitives with Numerals in Boro.

The definitives in Boro prefixed to the numeral and the whole
combination follows the noun. In other words the permissible sequence is Noun + Def. + Numeral.

/bizab gaŋ-ṃqi/ 'book + def. + two'
/bilai gaŋ- t̄ama/ 'leaves + def. + three'

4.5 Definitives and Demonstrative Pronouns in Boro.

Unlike Assamese the Definitives are not essentially required to be attached to the demonstrative Pronouns. It is possible to have constructions such as dem. + noun only. The demonstrative pronoun and the noun remain as separate word.

/be + mansi/ ‘this man’
/bəi + bizab/ ‘that book’
/be + mosow/ ‘this cow’

But if the speaker so wishes he could use the definitives after nouns and not after the demonstratives. For example;

/pencil-a/ ‘this very pencil’
/bizab-a/ ‘this very book’
/no-a/ ‘this very house’

4.6 Definitives with Demonstrative and Numerals in Boro.

As seen before, definitive are not suffixed to the demonstrative pronouns in Boro. Therefore, in a construction where there is a demonstrative and numeral, the definitives occur after the numeral only; the demonstrative as a qualifier precedes the combination of definitives + numerals, and the noun occurs as the last constituent + definitives and the noun occurs as the
last constituent in the phrase. The following example could be seen;

/be gaŋ-naŋi bizab/ ‘these two books’
/be gaŋ-se bilai/ ‘this one leaf’

4.7 **Definitives with Interrogative Pronoun in Boro.**

There are interrogative pronouns in Boro. The following interrogative pronouns express the interrogative meanings standing as substitutes for nouns. These are -

4.7.1 /sər/ ‘who’, standing for human beings in particular (general nominative) as a pronoun, it is always singular in form, implying plural sense if necessary in the relevant context and is capable of taking all principal nominal suffixes and a limited number of terminal nominal suffixes. As reduplicated forms, it has distributive and plural sense. For example;

/bi sər/ ‘who is this (person?)’
/sər sər pʰaŋ⁴kʰə l/ ‘who have come?’

4.7.2 /obe ~bobe/ ‘which’, ‘what determinatively’

It is irregular in respect of taking nominal suffixes; for example,

/bobe-kʰo w nəŋə l/ ‘which one you need?’
/nəŋ obe zajgajao tʰəjə l/ ‘where do you live?’

4.7.3 /bow/ ‘in what’, where

It is used as in a complex form, /bow-haj/ ‘where definitely’. These forms have irregularities in respect of taking nominal suffixes; for example -

/nəŋ bow tʰəŋə l/ ‘where will you go?’
/bow haj na məŋə l/ ‘where fish is available?’

4.7.4 /ma/ ‘what’
It indicates question or queries relating to an event or a thing or a being in general nominative context; for example -

/ŋṈnì sipìiao ma doŋo/ ‘what is in your pocket?’

/ŋṈ ma zajə/ ‘what do you eat?’

4.8 **Definitives with Adjectives in Boro.**

In Boro most of the Adjectives could function as nouns. Therefore definitives could follow adjectives directly as immediate constituent here they function like suffixes. There is no need unlike English to use some dummy pronouns after the adjectives. Therefore, ‘one’ in the English glossary is put in the bracket. The following examples of adj. + defi. could be seen.

/muəzaŋ-a/ ‘the good (one)’

/somainə-a/ ‘the beautiful (one)’

4.9 **Quantifiers in Boro.**

In Boro also some nouns referring to contain of units of measurement could be suffixed to the head noun to express a unit of measurement or count. It is obligatory to use numeral after such construction invariably such expressions make a definitive sense and refer to the number expressed through the numerals. As the quantifiers are used in day-to-day counting we find that classifier {mUna-} is prefixed to the cardinal numbers. Of the cardinal numbers from one to ten, the first five are commonly and regularly used without the least of dialectical differences. In respect of the cardinal numbers from six to ten, there are irregularities and considerable
There are some quantifiers proper which do not refer to any container or unit of measurement, but they express some quantities of any mass nouns or some count nouns used as mass nouns. Such are always precede the noun. Examples could be seen as follows;

/ese som/ ‘a little while’
/ese d$qi/ ‘a little water’
/ese mairo$n/ ‘little rice’

This /ese~ise/ further pronominal derivation is possible; though we don’t have a very regular paradigm of derivation. The difference of meaning is sometimes difficult to explain according to Dr. Bhattacharya³.

/ese~eseba$n~esa$n~esa$n$y$a~esa$n$mani~ep$y$a~esegrab~esa/

‘a little’

4.10 Quantifiers with Demonstratives in Boro.

As seen before, demonstratives maintain separate entity. As the definitives are not suffixed to them. The demonstratives as a separate word appear before the head noun and qualifies it. The following example could be seen -

/be d$qi d$qihu-se/ ‘this one pitcher of water’
4.11 Quantifiers with Numerals.

When quantifiers are to be mentioned in terms of numerals concerned is suffixed to the qualifier and the referent noun precedes the construction. The following examples could be seen;

/daqi gilas- se/ 'one glass of water'
/daqi gilas-nqi/ 'two glasses of water'
/majroh khada-nqi/ 'two basketful of rice'

4.12 Quantifiers with Adjectives in Boro.

Adjectives if any, precede the construction of Noun + Qualifier and they remain as separate entities qualifying the noun + qualifier. It is obligatory in Boro to use the numeral for ‘one’ when a single unit of measurement or count is mentioned. Given below a few examples;

/muzaq+z+daqi+gilas +a/‘one good glass of water
/gazri + qin+khri + kʰurqi + a/‘a bad pot of curry’

4.13 Quantifiers with Interrogative Pronouns in Boro.

When there is an interrogative pronoun in a construction in Boro the order of occurrence of the ‘noun and the qualifier’ gets reversed and the interro pronoun precedes construction as a qualifiers. In other words they occur in the order of Interrogative + Qualifier + Noun. Given below are
some examples;

Inter. Pron. + Qua.+ N.

/mqnbese + k'ada + mairōŋ/ ‘how many basketful of rice’?
/bese + gilas + dنغi/ ‘how many glasses of water’?
/bese + samus +muli/ ‘how many spoonful of medicine’?

4.14 Concluding Remarks.

4.14.1 The feature of using some particles with nouns that function as definitives/classifiers is common to both the languages. But there is difference in their function. In Assamese, they are basically definitives with some degree of classificatory force. In Boro, they are basically classifiers with some degree of expression of definitiveness. In Assamese, any noun that is known to both the speaker and the hearer (in a situation where both have talked about it some point of time) must necessarily take any of the definitives-cum-classifiers in specific.

4.14.2 Demonstratives in Assamese can’t occur without the suffixation of definitives either with themselves or with the nouns referred to. It is not so in Boro. Boro nouns could optionally occur without the classifiers and the demonstratives in Boro do not take the classifiers at all. Beside the use of definitive-cum-classifiers in Assamese always implies singularity. It is not so in Boro. Boro has to use /se/ ‘one’ after the classifier to refer to singularity, otherwise numerals other than /se/ occur to mark plural.

4.14.3 Similarly the qualifiers in both the languages behave alike except that in the construction where there is an interrogative pronoun. Boro shows
reversibility of word order. Thus it appears that the speakers of Assamese or Boro could learn the control of the system of 'definitives-cum-classifier' of the other language without much of difficulty. It is mostly a question of learning the correspondences in the other language than learning a system, and therefore, it possesses no big learning problem.
4.14 Notes and Explanations

1. The definitive {-kʰɔni} is related with old-Indo-Aryan /kʰɔndo/

   may be used after names of animals e.g. /gai-zɔni/ ‘the cow’, /häh-zɔni/
   ‘the duck’ etc.