Vocabulary

The analysis of the lexical items shows heavy infiltration of Indo-Aryan loan words and to some extent the incorporation of English words.

The degree of linguistic interference varies spatially, from the rural to semi-urban or urban areas and temporally from the older to the younger generation.

The common Indo-Aryan words identified in the basic vocabulary are mainly in the domains of:

(a) Numerals:

The data on numerals in the basic vocabulary indicates that numeral /bijła-ʃi/, meaning ‘twenty’ which is incorporated in the counting 20 to 29, 40 to 49, 60 to 99 is borrowed from the Bengali numeral /biʃ/ meaning ‘twenty’.

The ordinal numeral ‘first’ is borrowed from Bengali word /poila/ and the rest ordinal numbers are used by compounding the Bengali cardinals and the English word ‘number’. All these borrowed ordinal numbers are nativised and pronounced in a typical Dimasa way. For example:

/pʰuiła/ ‘first’

/dui nombor/ ‘second’

/tʰin nombor/ ‘third’

As far as the numeral system is concerned, Menninger (1969) said that number words strongly resist change. But the field observation shows that there is a tendency among the younger generations to replace the native numeral system by Bengali numeral system after counting 5 or 6 than the older generation. The borrowing of numerals is
understandable in view of the extensive commercial transactions between the Dimasas and the non-Dimasas.

(b) Classifiers:

The Barak Valley dialect of Dimasa also uses numeral classifiers of the Bengali or its local dialect Sylheti like /zon/ with human nouns and /ta/ which is pronounce as /tʰa/ or /kʰan/ with non-human nouns. For example:

- /ek-zon/ ‘one man’
- /dui-zon/ ‘two men’
- /ek-tʰa/ ‘the one’
- /tʰin-tʰa/ ‘the three’
- /dui-kʰan/ ‘the two’
- /pʰas-kʰan/ ‘the five’

(c) Kinship terms:

Some kinship terms are also borrowed from the Indo-Aryan words with different pronunciation. For example:

- /baba/ ‘father’
- /mama/ ‘mother’s brother’
- /mami/ ‘mother’s brother’s wife’
- /kʰakʰa/ ‘uncle’
- /kʰakʰi/ ‘uncle’s wife’
- /pʰisa/ ‘father’s sister’s husband’
While addressing the elder brother or elder sister, the Dimasa dialect of Barak Valley uses the shortened form /da/ and /di/ of ‘dada’ and ‘didi’ after the person’s name as it happens in Bengali. For example:

/ram-da/ ‘brother Ram’
/salu-di/ ‘sister Salu’

(d) The temporal organization:

The use of discrete time nouns consists of Indo-Aryan loans are- /din/ ‘day’, /mas/ ‘month’, /bosor/ ‘year’, /haptʰa/ or /soptʰa/ ‘week’.

(e) Adjectives:


The colour terminology shows borrowing from the Bengali words such as /beguni/ ‘purple’, /nil/ ‘blue’, /akʰasi/ ‘sky blue’, /kʰosua/ ‘colour of arum leaf’, /gulapʰi/ ‘pink’.
(f) **Adverbs:**

The Indo-Aryan loan words found in the domain of adverbs are like /abar/ ‘again’, /matʰro/ ‘only’, /zemon/ ‘like’ /hotʰat/ ‘suddenly’, /eksonge/ ‘together’ /bekkʰar/ ‘unnecessarily’ etc.

The reduplicated Bengali loan adverbs either complete or partial are also found. For example: /astʰe astʰe/ ‘slowly’, /gone gone/ ‘again and again’, /loge loge/ ‘immediately’ /andupʰandu/ ‘unknowingly’, /kʰulakʰuli/ ‘openly’, /tʰuktʰak/ ‘in small quantity’, /asepʰase/ ‘all round’, /zokʰon tʰokʰon/ ‘at any time’ etc.

(g) **Verbs:**

Many Bengali or the local dialect of Bengali verbs are incorporated in the domains of verb. However, the verbal affixes like tense/aspect, person markers etc. are not borrowed. Some of the borrowed verb formations given in italic in sentences are as follows:-

/əŋ akʰɪ –du/
I draw -Pre.
‘I draw’.

/bo urai -kʰa/
he rumour -Past.
‘he spread the rumour’.

/əŋ zomai –jai –du/
I collect –Prog. –Pre.
‘I am collecting’.

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It is interesting to see that the Bengali verb formation changes according to persons but the Barak Valley dialect of Dimasa does not show such changes, the same verb form is used irrespective of person and number. For example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimasa</th>
<th>Bengali</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>/aŋ buzi –du/</td>
<td>/ami buzī/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I understand –Pre.</td>
<td>I understand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘I understand’.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| /nuŋ buzi –du/ | /t̪ umi buzo/ |
| you understand –Pre. | You understand |
| ‘you understand’. |          |

| /bo buzi –du/ | /se buze/ |
| he understand –Pre. | He understand |
| ‘he understand’. |         |

In case of borrowed conjunct verb (N/Adj.+Verb) system, verbs are from Dimasa and noun/adjectives are from Indo-Aryan Bengali words. For example:

| /ʃeʃ zama/ | end to become |
| ‘to end’ |

| /ʃuru zama/ | start to become |
| ‘to start’ |

| /ʃikar kʰlaima/ | hunt to do |
| ‘to hunt’ |
(h) Miscellaneous:

A large number of loan words belonging to different categories are taken from Bengali/English and they are kept together under the heading of miscellaneous. They are:


In conclusion, we can say that the degree of lexical interference varies spatially from rural to urban areas. Lexical interference is highest among the speakers living in close geographical proximity of Bengali speaking areas. While speakers living in rural areas retains much of the native words as interaction with Bengalis is considerably less.

The lexical interference also varies temporally from the older to the younger generation. Naturally, the retention of original Dimasa words is higher in the older generation. The interference of Bengali-English words is higher among the younger generation as they are exposed to these languages in a much higher scale. It happened because of their greater mobility, their eagerness to imitate the modern culture etc.

The sex variable is also equally significant. The Dimasa women living in rural areas retain a higher degree of Dimasa words in comparison to men as they have less contact with the outside world, and hence, function as the preservers and carriers of the Dimasa language. As the men folk are always moving from one place to another either as government servants or as domestic servants or for business purposes, they have to use Bengali as a mode of communication with outsiders as it is used in government offices, also a lingua franca in the Barak Valley region. As a result, it interferes in their day-to-day speech and more and more lexical items belonging to Sylheti Bengali are used by the Dimasa males in their day-to-day life.

Education plays an important role in bringing new Bengali and English words into Dimasa. As Dimasa is not introduced in educational institutions, government offices, Dimasas get education through Bengali medium or English medium. As a result, the educated Dimasa speakers’ speech is always accompanied by a lot of interferences from Bengali-English words.

But still they are maintaining their native language even though Dimasas are a minority community in Barak Valley. This language maintenance is accompanied by lexical interference. In other words, a lot of Bengali words have entered the Dimasa lexicon and they are nativised. Even in some cases, the original Dimasa words are not to be found anymore and they are lost forever as we have shown above. Roughly more than 1000
Bengali words are used by the Dimasa population of Barak Valley in their day today life and in case of the younger generation, the number will be much higher as they are constantly in touch with their Bengali friends.

The motivation for borrowing from Bengali comes from two angles. They are need and prestige. As Hawar dialect of Dimasa is having the native words for all the items, the need factor does not play any role. Therefore, it seems that Hawar dialect of Dimasa speakers are extensively borrowing from the local variety of Bengali because the Dimasas somehow believe that Sylheti Bengali is more prestigious than Hawar dialect of Dimasa.