INTRODUCTION

Geolinguistics of the Dudhnoi Dialect; the scope of the study and the theoretical model:

0.1 This is a consciously theory-based synchronic study of one of the least explored varieties of Assamese designated the Dudhnoi Dialect (henceforth DD) on logical and linguistic grounds. In terms of the number of speakers and the extensive unified geographical area in which they live, DD is one of the major dialects of Assamese. It is spoken mostly in the Goalpara district (on the south bank of the river Brahmaputra) extending from the Deusila river in the east to the Lela area in the west, Garo Hills in the south and the Matia area in the north (Vide Map No. 2).

0.2 The linguistic boundary can roughly be defined as being bounded by the Dhupdhara dialect in the east, the Habraghat dialect in the west, Boro, Nepali, Bengali languages and the Dhupdhara dialect in the north and the Garo language in the south. Along the south of the National Highway and the north of the foothills of Garo Hills a
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A FEW POCKETS OF DUDHNOI DIALECT SPEAKING AREA.
narrow DD speaking belt extends up to Risu Belpara in the west including the Agia region, fifteen kilometers south of Goalpara town. There are a few pockets of DD speaking people in Mendipathar, Dainadubi, Rangzeng, Nangalbibra, Baghmar, Mayamnagar, Kharkhuta and Adogiri — all in the Garo Hills district of Meghalaya (Vide Map No. 3). The DD speaking people in ethnic terms belong to the Rabha, Garo and Indo-Aryan stocks.

Various authors called this dialect the South Goalpara dialect. But owing to the fact that a number of distinct dialects in the South Goalpara region can be identified in linguistic terms, the use of this ambiguous term is likely to create confusion and hence the label Dudhnoi Dialect.

The dialect under investigation is spoken in a well-defined geographical area of which the Dudhnoi town is the Commercial, cultural and administrative centre. Moreover, the speakers of this dialect identify themselves as the speakers of the Dudhnoi variety of Assamese. This important factor prompted the researcher to reject the earlier name and to label the dialect under investigation as the Dudhnoi Dialect of Assamese.
There are others who would prefer to call this dialect Rabhamese in analogy with the institutionalized terms like Nagamese \(^1\) (a pidgin \(^2\) originating from contact between Assamese and the Naga language), Arunachalese (also called Nefamese \(^3\) by some). Their opting for this term was prompted by the fact that most speakers of this dialect belong to the Rabha tribe who are ethnically of the Mongoloid stock but are linguistically Assamese. The ethnic break-up of the population in the DD speaking area is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rabha</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boro</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garo</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assamese</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Non-tribal Hindu)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assamese</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Non-tribal Non-Hindu)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bengali</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Non-tribal)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nepali</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Non-tribal)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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1. Sreedhar, M.V., Standardized Grammar of Naga Pidgin, 1985, pp. 1, 158
(b) Lehmann, W.P., Historical Linguistics, An Introduction, 1976, pp. 221-23
(c) Hudson, R.A., Sociolinguistics, 1988, pp. 61-6
(d) Romaine, S., Pidgin & Creole Language, 1990
There are Marowari, Hindi-speaking and Punjabi people engaged in various trades, but their number is not substantial. 4

This statistic is based on the electoral rolls published in 1991. The investigator himself is ethnically a Rabha, but linguistically an Assamese. The logic of not opting for the term Rabhamese is that the Dudhnoi Dialect is not of pidgin ancestry. Hence it is not a baselect of the acrolect Assamese, because linguistically speaking it fits into the dialect continuum pattern of the Assamese language prevalent along the south bank of the river Brahmaputra. Along with the south Kamrup and south Goalpara dialects (which are geographically contiguous) the Dudhnoi Dialect is a part of the dialect continuum of Assamese in that extensive area.

0.6 In this context it would be quite relevant to describe the distribution of the Rabha population in Assam and the adjoining states. The Rabha tribe lives scattered all


5&6(a) Fishman, J.R., Readings in Sociology of Language, 1968

Sociolinguistics: A brief introduction, 1971
The Sociology of Languages, An introduction Social Science approach to language in society, 1977

(b) Hudson, R.A., Sociolinguistics, 1988, p. 67
over Assam — a few Rabha dominated areas being Sandodinga, Debitola in the Dhubri district, Abhayapuri in the Bangaigaon district, Serphangguri, Kasugaon in the Kokrajhar district, Tamolpur in the Nalbari district, Rani, Loharghat, Chhaygaon, Boko, Singra in the Kamrup district, Tangla, Khuirabari in the Darrang district, Tezpur in the Sonitpur district, Samaguri in the Newgaon district, Dhupdhara, Krishnai, Baladamari, Bardamal, Kharmuza, Baida, Lakhipur, Hatigaon, Manikganj in the Goalpara district (Vide Map No. 4).

The Rabha people lost their ancestral language — in the remote past. The reason of this language loss is anybody's conjecture. There is yet another example of language loss in the history of Assam. The Ahoms who invaded Assam in 1229 A.D. and ruled over it for more than six hundred years, lost their ancestral language, religion and culture and got assimilated with the local population.

At present only in a few pockets — Bardamal, Lakhipur, Baida, Hatigaon, Manikganj and Kharmuza in the Goalpara district — two varieties of Rabha — Rangdani and Maitori — are spoken. But even the speakers of these two dialects are bilingual — they speak Rabha and Assamese with the same degree of competence. In fact there is no monolingual Rabha anywhere in Assam today.
One important fact worth taking note of in this context is that the people of the Rabha ethnic group constitute what may be called a multidialectal group — because Rabhas inhabiting the different parts of Assam speak the local dialects as native speakers owing to the loss of their ancestral language. Thus Rabhas hailing from Debitola and Sandodinga speak the Dhubri dialect, those hailing from South Kamrup speak the South Kamrup dialect, those from the Tezpur and Samaguri areas speak the Standard Dialect of Assamese and so on. Map No. 4 shows the distribution of the Rabha population in the different parts of Assam and Meghalaya and the dialects they speak. It also shows the Rangdani and Maitori speaking pockets.

Map No. 3 represents the Dudhnoi revenue circle which was carved out by the Government of Assam in 1962. Before that it was a part of the Bijni state. It was a coincidence that 90% of the population hailing from the Dudhnoi revenue circle are native speakers of the Dudhnoi Dialect. According to the 1991 Census Report, there are 1,14,699 speakers of the Assamese language in the Dudhnoi circle. It can be safely surmised that of this population, 90% speak the Dudhnoi Dialect and the rest the other contiguous dialects.

(like Habraghat and Dhupdhara dialects) and non-contiguous dialects of Assamese (like Guwahatiese, South Kamrup dialect, the Standard Dialect, Barpeta dialect, Goalpara dialect and so on).

The Dudhnoi town is the commercial, cultural and administrative centre of a very extensive area. Its hinterland extends up to Gauhati in the East, Mankachar and Lakhipur in the West, the interior of Garo Hills in the South, Bijni, Howly etc. in the North. It is the gateway to the East and West Garo Hills and Baghmara districts of Meghalaya. All the different communities -- linguistic and ethnic -- are dependent on Dudhnoi -- commercially, culturally and in administrative matters. They are dependent on Dudhnoi for civic amenities like hospital services, education etc. People from outside the Dudhnoi circle (including many villages in the Garo Hills) are exclusively dependent on Dudhnoi for their medical and educational needs. It serves as the employment centre for daily wage-earners belonging to the different linguistic/ethnic/religious groups hailing from beyond the Dudhnoi circle. It is well-connected with the rest of Assam. The National Highway 37 and the North-East Council Road pass through Dudhnoi -- connecting it with the rest of Assam and Meghalaya. The traders of different areas procure their goods from the Dudhnoi.
wholesale and retail markets. Producers of the various agricultural commodities sell their produce like rice, arecanut, orange, pineapple, ginger, green chilli, banana, cotton, eggs and poultries, potato, yam and other green vegetables in the Dudhnoi daily and weekly markets, either in retail or in wholesale.

0.10 Since this area is frequented by linguistically heterogeneous groups of people many features — phonological, grammatical and lexical — have percolated into the Dudhnoi Dialect. These have been dealt with (briefly though) in the relevant sections.

0.11 This study is primarily based on the speech of the investigator himself who happens to be the principal informant. It is basically a study of the idiolect of the investigator. In case of doubts, there have been cross-checkings of the data with the speech of other homogeneous speakers. Collection of data and analysis thereof lasted for nearly a quinquennium.

0.12 The investigator belongs to the educated group of DD speakers. It has been established that DD comprises two varieties of speech — the Low variety and the High variety. Elderly people (of the 60+ age group) and uneducated ones
use the Low variety only. But people like the investigator use the Low and High varieties with equal degrees of competence. This diglossic situation has been dealt with in the relevant section.

0.13 The investigator while collecting the Low variety data consulted his parents and his elderly neighbours and other people like cultivators, traders, day labourers and so on. The data collected and the analysis thereof may therefore be accepted as authentic.

0.14 Thus, this investigation encompassed two parallely existing varieties of DD — the Low variety and the High variety. It can be claimed that the linguistic analysis is valid for the Dudhnoi Dialect as spoken by the native speakers — the young and old, educated and uneducated.

The relevant data from the Standard Dialect and the geographically contiguous dialects have been collected in course of the field study from time to time. For the SD data the informants chosen hailing from the districts of Golaghat, Jorhat and Sibsagar, are associated with the Gauhati University in some capacity or other. The data from the contiguous dialects were collected from the speech of the traders, Government servants and daily wage earners.
who are either permanent residents of Dudhnoi or are daily commuters. As and when the need arose the investigator occasionally visited those areas and did his field study there.

0.15 The choice of the theoretical model:

The model of analysis adopted for the purposes of the investigation is that of the Bloomfieldian School or the American Descriptive School. Within the Major Bloomfieldian School various sub-schools flourished -- this study aligns itself with what may safely be designated the Bernard Bloch sub-school.

0.16 The factors which prompted the choice of the Bloomfieldian model to the exclusion of others (like TG etc.) is best accounted for by the fact that the investigator received his first and elementary training in linguistics in the

10(a) Bloch, B. : A Set of Postulates for Phonemic Analysis, Language, 1948, pp. 243-46
(b) Bloch, B. & Trager, G.L. : Outline of Linguistic Analysis, 1972
Bloomfieldian model while he was doing the Master's degree course in Assamese. His exposure to Bloomfieldianism became more extensive in course of time. He had the opportunity of attending a few seminars on linguistics which, theoretically speaking, were Bloomfield-oriented. He had a more exhaustive and rigorous training in that same model when he subsequently did his second Master's degree course in Linguistics at the Gauhati University. The Gauhati University Master's degree syllabus has in it as one of the major components—an extensive teaching programme devoted to Bloomfieldian structuralism.

The researcher became convinced that a pioneering work of the type he has undertaken could best be done within the Bloomfieldian framework as the Dudhnoi Dialect is one of the unwritten dialects of Assamese.

Moreover, one important factor prompting the selection of theoretical model is that most linguistics and language programmes in Assam till now have a pronounced bias towards Bloomfieldian structuralism. It is only recently that scholars have started analysing the Standard Dialect of Assamese as per the tenets of the Chomskyan and other recent theoretical models in the Department of Linguistics, Gauhati University. Earlier all the researchers have
analyzed languages and dialects in the Bloomfieldian model.

The researcher consulted all the published and unpublished works of the various authors and research scholars who have contributed to the field of Assamese linguistics. The following is a list of some of the major works done in rigorous academic discipline, arranged chronologically —

1. Dr. B. Kakati: Assamese: Its Formation and Development, Calcutta University Publications, 1935 (a diachronic study in the Jules Bloch tradition);

2. Dr. U.N. Goswami: A Study of Kamrupi: a dialect of Assamese, Historical and Antiquarian Studies, Govt. of Assam, Gauhati, 1975 (a synchronic study in the Bloomfieldian model);

3. Dr. G.C. Goswami: Structure of Assamese, Department of Publication, Gauhati University, Gauhati, 1982 (a synchronic study in the Bloomfieldian model);


5. Mr. B. Kakati: Structures and Classes in the Grammar of Assamese, unpublished London University M.Phil dissertation, 1973, (a synchronic study in the Systematic model of Halliday);
6. Dr. B. Moral : The Semantics of Assamese, unpublished Gauhati University Ph.D. dissertation, 1988 (a synchronic study in the structural model);


0.19 The tenets of Bloomfieldianism are too well-known to be explained here. But it is worthwhile mentioning that the present study is free from the intricacies of Bloomfieldian behaviourism. The intention of the investigator is to keep away from controversies like interpretation\(^\text{11}\) of levels analysis in linguistic descriptions, place of Semantics in linguistic analysis and so on.\(^\text{12}\) While making the analysis the technique adopted is that the morpho-syntactic analysis is preceded by a phonetic and phonological analysis. Since the study is based on the spoken form of DD, it is obligatory that a thorough and rigorous phonetic and phonological analysis precedes a grammatical analysis.

\(^\text{11}\) Pike, K.L. : Interpenetration of Phonology, Morphology and Syntax,

\(^\text{12}\) Bloomfield, L. : Language, 1980, Chapter 9
One advantage obtained from a rigorous phonetic and phonological analysis is that it enabled the investigator to transcribe the examples cited either phonemically or allophonically as necessary.

In accordance with the unidirectional approach of the Bloomfieldian model, the phonetic and phonological analyses are conspicuously free from any anticipation or presumption of the needs of the subsequent grammatical (morpho-syntactic) analysis. The phonological features having implications for morphology and syntax of DD have been subsequently dealt with in the relevant sections. This study is not to be equated with the Trager-Smith type phonological grammars.

The investigator has been very careful in collecting and collcting the data properly, being prompted by the principle of clarity norm. No effort was spared in collecting the data as exhaustively as possible and in selecting and arranging the language material as rigorously as possible within the time-limit prescribed by the regulations of the Gauhati University governing the Ph.D. programmes.

14(a) Sampson, G. : Schools of Linguistics, 1987, pp.57-80
The units and terms posited for each level of analysis have been defined and substantiated in the clearest possible manner permitting no contradictions at any stage.

Each unit at any one level has been analyzed and defined and substantiated in terms of paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations that hold between other comparable units. All the terms are posited and defined strictly in structural or functional terms leaving no room for notion- alism. The canons of observational adequacy and descriptive adequacy guided the collection, selection and collection of data followed, as exhaustively as possible by a rigorous theory-based analysis and description at the relevant levels — phonetic, phonological, morphological and syntactic in that specific order.\textsuperscript{15}

The basic assumptions underlying this study are —

(1) languages or dialects exhibit diversity\textsuperscript{16} at the various levels, and (2) any one language or dialect constitutes an

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{15}(a) Chomsky, N. : Syntactic Structure, 1957
  \item \textsuperscript{15}(b) Lyons, J. : Structural Semantics, 1963, Chapter- 1.
  \item \textsuperscript{16} Hymes, D. & Fought, J. : American Structuralism, 1981.
\end{itemize}
integrated structure. Bloomfieldian structuralism provides any researcher with a theoretical framework with which the endless diversities exhibited by languages can be well accounted for. It provides any researcher with techniques and criteria to segment and subcategorize units and features within the integrated structure of language/dialect.

Two chapters -- one on a study in contrast between SD and DD and the other on the linguistics of dialect contact and socio-linguistics of code-switching\(^{18}\) and diglossia\(^{19}\) have been appended to the principal and basic analysis of the dialect within the Bloomfieldian framework. This is not to be construed as constituting a departure from the theoretical model adopted. As has already been stated Bloomfield himself recognized the immense diversity exhibited by languages or dialects and a study in contrast between two dialects of Assamese -- SD and DD -- is therefore in perfect consonance with his theoretical postulates.


(b) Hudson, R.A.: Socio-linguistics, 1988, pp. 56-58

19(a) Ferguson, C.A.: Diglossia, 1959

(b) Hudson, R.A.: Socio-linguistics, 1988, pp. 53-5
Bloomfieldianism does not inhibit observations on any language/dialect in socio-linguistic terms. A language/dialect is susceptible to variations at different levels owing to contact with other languages and dialects because of geographical contiguity and various different social, cultural, economic factors. The final chapter describes all these and explores the socio-linguistics of code-switching and diglossia. These explorations are neither incongruous nor incompatible with Bloomfieldian descriptivism.