ABSTRACT

THE STRUCTURE OF KOKBOROK

The present research work entitled “The Structure of Kokborok” is the descriptive study of Kokborok, a Tibeto-Burman language spoken in Unakoti District (earlier known as North Tripura District) of Tripura state in Northeast India. Kokborok belongs to the Bodo-Garo (Benedict, 1972) group of Tibeto-Burman family of languages, and is spoken mainly in the state of Tripura and in some parts of Assam and Bangladesh. Kokborok is officially recognized language and it is taught in schools in the State of Tripura.

The present thesis is divided into six chapters: Introduction, Review of Literature, Phonology, Morphology, Syntax and Conclusion.

Chapter 1 explains the background details of Kokborok language, such as its name, its linguistic affiliation, its population, its status etc. and finally explains the methodology used in the thesis.

Chapter 2 provides an overview of literature on Kokborok language. The available literatures on this subject matter are very scanty. However, a few linguistic works have been reviewed in the present research work. The linguistic work includes grammatical sketches, vocabularies, dictionary etc.

Chapter 3 discusses the phonology of Kokborok. Kokborok has eleven stops i.e., /p, b, pʰ, t, d, tʰ, c, j, k, g, kʰ/, two fricatives /s and h/, three nasals /m, n, η/, two liquids /l and r/ and two semi-vowels /w and y/ and six vowel phonemes i.e., /i, e, a, o, u and i/ in its phonemic inventory. The chapter also provides the contrasting pairs of consonants and vowels and the distribution of consonants and vowels. All the consonantal
phonemes do not occur in all three positions of the word. However, six consonants /p, k, m, n, l, r/ can occur in all three positions. While /pʰ, b, k, kʰ, g, t, d, tʰ, c, j, s, h, w, y/ can occur in word initial and medial position only. The velar nasal /ŋ/ occurs in word medial and final position. The absent of voiced stops /b, d, g, j/ in syllable or word final position and the non-occurrence of /t/ in final position is noticed in Kokborok. All the vowels except central high /i/ can occur in all three positions. The central vowel /i/ occurs medially rather than in word initial and final position. Lexically, two tones have been realized in Kokborok viz. high and low. Three diphthongs are found in Kokborok i.e., /ai, ui and oi/. All the diphthongs cannot occur in all three positions. Among them, /ai/ occurs in all three positions, while /ui/ and /oi/ occur only in word medial and final positions. The predominance of consonant clusters is very rare. Kokborok has initial consonant clusters which occur only in syllable initially but no final cluster is found in the language. Instead, the frequent occurring of consonant sequences in the language has been observed. Kokborok has more number of consonant sequences than consonant clusters. It is worth mentioning that consonant sequences occur across syllabic boundary. The first members are stop, nasal, liquid and fricative and the second members are stop, fricative, nasal and liquid. Monosyllabic words are common in Kokborok i.e., even a vowel can be a syllable or morpheme or word in the language. Majority of the monosyllabic words in Kokborok have the CV pattern. Words generally consist of two or three syllables. In Kokborok the nucleus of the syllable may be a vowel or a diphthong. A word in Kokborok can be upto pentasyllabic. Only a vowel can be a minimum syllable in Kokborok. Five phonological processes are identified viz. vowel harmony, glide insertion, apocope, regressive assimilation and voicing.
Chapter 4 deals with the morphology of Kokborok. It discusses nouns, gender, pronouns, number, numerals, numeral classifiers, case, postpositions, adjectives, verbs, tense, aspect, mood and modality, adverbs and word formation. Nouns in Kokborok can be classified into basic, derived and compound nouns. As a Tibeto-Burman language, Kokborok lacks grammatical gender, but gender distinction is made on the basis of natural recognition of sex. Pronouns can be classified into personal, demonstrative, interrogative, reflexive and indefinite pronouns. Personal pronouns show three way contrast in person and two way in number i.e., singular and plural. Kokborok contrast two way distinctions in number viz. singular and plural. Singular is unmarked in the language. However, plural is marked by suffixing -rok to nouns or pronouns and -sok to personal names and kinship terms. Personal pronouns differentiate three persons and two numbers i.e., first, second and third person with singular and plural number. Numerals in Kokborok are of basically decimal type. They are classified into cardinals, ordinals, multiplicative and fractional. Kokborok has a large number of classifiers, which is used for the purpose of enumeration. The classifier morphemes are prefixed to the numerals and both the classifiers and numerals follow the noun. There are nine cases in the language viz. nominative, accusative, dative, locative, instrumental, comitative, genitive and intrusive. As a nominative-accusative language, the nominative case is unmarked in the language, while other cases are marked by different markers. Like other SOV languages, adpositions in Kokborok are postpositions. Adjectives in the language can categorized into simple, derived and compound.

Verb in Kokborok is defined as a morpheme capable of taking aspect markers or imperative marker. The verbs in Kokborok are not marked by for person-number-gender. Verb roots are being divided according to their structures into two types- (i) Simple root and (ii) Derived root. The
simple verb stems are composed of both monosyllabic and disyllabic roots that may be either in open or closed syllable. Structurally, compound stem in Kokborok consists of verb + verb and noun + verb. Morphologically, there is no differentiation between transitive and intransitive verb. However, the duo can be categorized by their arguments. The infinitive form of a verb is formed by suffixing \(-na\) to the verb stem. In Kokborok, almost all the verbs irrespective of action, process and active, verbs can be causativized by the versatile verb \(ri\) meaning ‘give’. It is one of the productive morphological processes in Kokborok and other Bodo-Garo languages of North East India.

Adverbs are classified into adverb of manner, adverb of time, adverb of location and direction, derived adverbs, compound and reduplicated adverbs and adverbs of degree.

There are three tenses in Kokborok which indicates present, past and future. All the tenses are marked morphologically by different markers. Further, four aspects viz. continuative, completive, iterative and inceptive and eight moods viz. imperative, prohibitive, capability, probability, obligation, necessity, conditional and concessive are also analyzed in the language.

As for word formation, Kokborok mainly uses three processes viz., compounding, affixation and reduplication, of which compounding is the most productive. Compounding in the language can be classified into compound nouns, compound verbs, compound adjectives and compound adverbs. Affixation can be in the form both prefixation and suffixation. Prefixation includes pronominal prefix, causative prefix and deverbal adjective prefix and suffixation includes verbal suffixes i.e., tense,
aspects, moods etc. and nominal suffixes. The reduplication is basically of complete and partial.

**Chapter 5** deals with syntax of Kokborok. It provides an overview of noun phrases, verb phrases, and different types of clause, negation, interrogative, nominalization, Reflexivization, word order, causativization, passivization and finally types of sentences in Kokborok.

A noun can be a minimal structure of a noun phrase. A noun phrase can have one or more than one modifiers. The modifiers may be demonstratives, adjectives, quantifiers, numeral classifiers etc. The genitive always precedes the noun it modifies. When a demonstrative and adjective modifies the noun alone, the demonstrative precedes the noun and the adjective follows the noun. The numeral classifier usually follows the noun. Similarly, adjective also follows the noun as well.

Verb phrase in Kokborok must consist of an adverb and some other optional elements (NPs or Adverbs) which generally precede the verb. There are three basic types of clauses viz. declarative, interrogative and imperative. In Kokborok declarative clause is unmarked; however, interrogative and imperative are signaled by affixes particularly the suffixes.

Like most of the South Asian languages, Kokborok makes use of the same nominalizers viz. *-ma* and *-nai* for relativization. The subjects of agentive transitive or non-transitive intransitive clauses are relativized by the relativizer *-nai* and the object is relativized by the marker *-ma* where the relative clause precedes the head noun. It is one of the typical features of Kokborok as both the subject and object are relativized by different markers whereas in other Tibeto-Burman languages both the subject and object are relativized by the same marker. Kokborok exhibits externally
headed relative clause where the relativized noun occurs to the right of the clause. Headless relative is found in the language. Like other Tibeto-Burman languages, Kokborok lacks relative pronouns such as who, whom etc as found in Indo-Aryan languages.

Like many other Tibeto-Burman languages, negation in the language is expressed by means of affixation i.e., either by prefixation or suffixation. There are three negative markers in Kokborok: ta-, -ya and -gilak. The affix ta- and -gilak is used only with verbs, however, the suffix -ya is used to negate nominal and verbal predicates. One of the interesting features of Kokborok is the presence of negative existential predicate kurui as many other Bodo-Garo languages of North East India do.

Passive construction in Kokborok is formed by suffixing -jak to the verb root followed by the tense markers and other verbal suffixes. Passive in the language can be personal and impersonal.

Causatives in Kokborok can be of two types viz. morphological and lexical. Morphological causatives are formed by affixing the prefixes $p^hV$, $mV$, $sV$- and by attaching the versatile verb ri ‘give’ to the verb root.

The conditional clause in Kokborok precedes the conclusion as the normal word order in all languages. In a declarative sentence with subject and object, the unmarked order is that the subject precedes the object. Like other Tibeto-Burman languages, when the adjectives follow the noun in Kokborok it expresses all the inflectional categories of the noun.

The existential, possessive and locative constructions in Kokborok are formed by using the verb ion followed by the tense marker.

Three types of sentences are found in Kokborok viz. simple, complex and compound sentence. As a verb final language, verbs normally follow the
subject and object i.e., in other words both the subject and object precedes the verb. A sentence with direct object and indirect object in which indirect object always precedes the direct object. As an SOV language, the alternative word order in Kokborok is OSV.

There are two appendices in this thesis. The first appendix contains Riddles in Kokborok. The second appendix is a Kokborok-English vocabulary.