2 Literature Review

2.0 Preview

Before we undertake a review of the existing literature in Bodo, we want to begin this chapter with the philosophical note - knowledge proceeds; new knowledge is built on old knowledge; even though new knowledge may not be complete or may be challenged. When new ideas or knowledge is applied, new discoveries and inventions are made. In this regard, the inventions of science and technology, especially information technology, have revolutionized the world and these have a direct impact on linguistic science among other disciplines. Thus, any linguistic idea or work that was considered important or relevant at one point of time may not be considered important and relevant now. It needs to be made clear that the purpose of this review is not to denigrate the work of the scholars, but to build on their knowledge.

Many grammar books have been written on Bodo but they are mostly done in traditional way – prescriptive instead of descriptive. To be precise, most of these works have Indo-Aryan, particularly Assamese coloring. It is seen that many of the categories that exist in Assamese, Hindi or in English are just blindly copied in those works. So, it is not surprising to see in the literatures of Bodo, the Verb/Tense system described exactly as in English or Assamese. One of the reasons for this practice is probably the belief that all languages are alike and behave in the same way. The lack of knowledge that a Tibeto-Burman language behaves quite differently than any Indo-Aryan language is another reason. Many of these works are written to fill the need of academic courses for different levels; so, they are quite basic rather than in-depth and thorough. The idea of Tibeto-Burman perspective in analyzing and presenting Bodo to readers is found to be lacking in many of these works. However, we need to understand the limitations and admit the fact that the contributions made by the scholars on the Bodo language have been on the basis of their knowledge, experience and exposure to linguistic analysis. Majority of the published works on Bodo have been done by local
scholars having literature background, but not linguistics background, to fulfill the academic needs of the students of the MIL (Bodo) department. Some of these works still deserve merit as they serve the need of the student community in a big way.

The available literature on Bodo can be conveniently discussed under three sections taking the work of Prof. Pramod Chandra Bhattacharya (1977) as a threshold. The reason for considering Bhattacharya’s work as a reference point is that his contribution to the Bodo language, from linguistic point of view, is the most comprehensive and authoritative one. He was a trained linguist; so, his work is based on the theories of modern linguistics. Thus, we divide the present chapter into the following main sub-sections:

a) the pre-Bhattacharya period which include mostly the pioneering contributions of the European scholars (Section 2.1)

b) the contributions of Bhattacharya (Section 2.2), and

c) the post-Bhattacharya period, i.e., the works done by the local Bodo scholars (Section 2.3).

We will then look at the commonalities and differences of works with reference to the purpose, product and output in the three periods in Section 2.4. After we will have reviewed the literature on Bodo proper, we will also have a look on closely related Bodo-Garo languages in Section 2.5. Then we will briefly talk about the language variety considered for this work in Section 2.6.

2.1 The pre-Bhattacharya period

Linguistic and ethnographic works on Bodo starts with British civil servants and Christian missionaries. The earliest known work on Bodo is by Hodgson (1847). Hodgson was a British civil servant, who did extensive work on linguistics and religion in India and Nepal. Hodgson is believed to use the term ‘Bodo’ first in the literature. However, it was used in a wide sense, i.e. of a sub-branch, which includes the present distinct languages of Dimasa, Meche, Rabha, Hajong, Garo, Koch and Tiwa. Jacquesson (2008) notes that Hodgson makes the first attempt to

The first outline grammar and the most comprehensive work known to us by the Europeans is Endle’s (1884) *Outline Grammar of the Kachari (Bodo) language as spoken in the district Darrang, Assam*. He was an American missionary. Unlike Hodgson, Endle’s work is specifically on Bodo, as distinct from its sister languages. Jacquesson (2008) notes that the work of Endle and his contemporary Anderson, serves as a model of descriptive work in the 20th century. He also rightly observes that Endle’s work on Bodo is not quite accurate.

Endle’s outline of Bodo grammar contains a description of Bodo phonology, morphology, and syntax with texts, illustrative sentences, reading lessons, and a short vocabulary. Endle spends 16 pages on verb and discusses wide range of verbal categories such as Mood (Indicative, Potential, Infinitive), Temporal expressions (Present time, Past time, Future time), passive voice, negative verbs, causative verbs, ‘compound verbs’, and so on. As Endle himself notes, he had problems in understanding the nature of Bodo morphosyntax (1884:16). As we will see the present understanding of Bodo morphosyntax (including other Bodo-Garo languages) is quite different from that of Endle’s. Grammatical categories in Bodo are not as quite straightforward as his numerous categories might suggest. His treatment of the so-called ‘compound verbs’ is particularly inaccurate and incomplete. This category lumped stem formatives with multi-verb complexes.

After Endle, another grammatical work on Bodo is that of Rev. L. Skreisrud (1889), called ‘*A short grammar on the Mech or Boro language*’ based on the dialect spoken in the Goalpara district. His focus in this work is on the phonology and grammar of the language. Other notable work on Bodo by the Europeans are Endle’s (1911) *The Kacharis*, which gives ethnographic descriptions on the Bodos and the Meches and Anderson’s (1895) *A Collection of Kachari Folktales and Rhymes*. The later work has seventeen Bodo folktales with English translation. It
also contains chapters on social customs, agriculture practices, festivities, food habits, life cycle rituals, crafts and textiles of the Bodos.

G.A. Grierson’s (1901) Linguistic Survey of India (Part-III) is the last work on Bodo by the Europeans. It contains sketches from Bodo in the form of stories and texts. Linguistic and anthropological work by outside scholars stopped due to inaccessibility of the Northeast India to outsiders for about hundred years. Linguistic work on Bodo after Grierson (1901) was taken up by local Bodo scholars, some of them under the banner of Bodo Sahitya Sabha (BSS), the literary organization of the Bodos established in 1952. We will talk about the works of the local Bodo scholars in detail below (2.3). However, the milestone in Bodo linguistics was established by Pramod Chandra Bhattacharya with the help of a Bodo speaker, named Bhaben Narzi. Pramod Chandra Bhattacharya writes the first and so far the only detailed descriptive grammar on Bodo. We will talk about this work in detail in the following section.

2.2 The contribution of Pramod Chandra Bhattacharya

P.C. Bhattacharya’s *A Descriptive Analysis of the Boro Language* (1977) is the first ever and major descriptive study of the Bodo language. It is a comprehensive grammar containing the phonology, morphology, syntax, simple texts and Bodo-English vocabulary of the language.

Bhattacharya’s work stands out from the rest of the work on Bodo after Grierson’s Linguistic Survey of India in approach, purpose and comprehensiveness. This work is a descriptive work carried out within the framework of descriptive and functional linguistics. Bhattacharya’s work was guided by theories of modern linguistics instead of the prescriptive tradition of writing Bodo grammars based on the models of Assamese and English. He treats Bodo on its own right and provides an analysis which is still to a great degree up to date. For example, his treatment of verb formatives into derivational and inflectional formatives is largely congruent with how other Bodo-Garo languages including Bodo are being analyzed.
The purpose of this work was also distinct from the rest of the work on Bodo since 1901. Most work on Bodo is done under the auspices of Bodo Sahitya Sabha to promote Bodo literacy. Thus, most of the works were designed to serve the immediate need to serve literacy. Grammar books were written to be taught at school, and models of the grammar books were the Assamese or English grammar books. Bhattacharya’s work was academic in nature – it was his Ph.D. dissertation submitted to Gauhati University. Thus, this work was carried out to provide a description of the spoken Bodo, which was based on the dialects of Goalpara and Kamrup districts.

Bhattacharya’s work is the most comprehensive work till date. It is a 380 pages long descriptive grammar that contains phonological, morphophonemic, morphological, and syntactic description along with a couple of sample texts, and small lexicon. Around 120 pages are devoted for the description of morphology of various word classes.

Even though, Bhattacharya’s work is comprehensive compared to other works, its treatment of the verb is rather sketchy. Only 29 pages are devoted to the discussion of the category of verb and verb morphology. Bhattacharya divides verbs into transitive and intransitive without putting much effort in describing how transitivity is encoded in Bodo. As we will see, all usual encoders of transitivity in Bodo have additional functions besides coding transitivity. The treatment of stem formation (derivation of verb bases) is satisfactory to a great extent. As many as 62, what we call adverbial suffixes, are listed and described. He also deals with combination of adverbial suffixes briefly. However, he does not go into what principle governs the organization of the adverbial suffixes in stem. As we will see, although it is not possible to specify the order of each adverbial suffixes, it is possible to specify a general rule – lexical specificity, that governs the ordering.

The treatment of the inflectional/finite affixes is largely congruent with the treatment by the current author, at least in approach. Bhattacharya does not try to classify the finite affixes into different verbal categories such as Tense, Aspect, Mood, and so on. Instead, he classifies them ‘on the basis of the type of construction that the resulting verb can enter into’, such as independent clauses,
subordinate clauses, and nominalized clauses (see page 190). Thus, he talks about
‘Finite verbal affixes’, ‘Subordinate verbal suffixes’, and ‘Substantive verbal
suffixes’. What is noteworthy about this treatment is not attempting to impose
categories which are not there, such as Tense, Aspect, Mood, etc. As we will see
later, there are no distinct paradigms for different verbal categories. What we have
is a whole range of first position inflectional suffixes with wide range of functions
with complementary distribution with each other, and a couple of second, third,
and fourth position suffixes.

The semantic characterization of the individual inflectional affixes is mostly
apt, but rather sketchy. The description of some suffixes such as -duyang as
‘continuous action in the present or in the immediate past’ is not quite accurate.
Moreover, only a few concatenations of the finite affixes are described by
Bhattacharya.

In sum, Bhattacharya’s work is the most comprehensive grammatical
description we have till date. The treatment of verb, verbal forms, and verbal
categories is more insightful than most current works. However, the semantic
characterization of the inflectional suffixes and the treatment of the concatenations
of the inflectional suffixes is where more extensive contributions can be made.

Besides Bhattacharya, almost all contributions on Bodo after 1901 are made by
the local Bodo scholars, who were primarily concerned with fulfilling the need of
textbooks on Bodo grammar to teach at school. The following section enumerates
the works of the local Bodo scholars.

2.3 Contributions of the local Bodo scholars

Several local scholars have made efforts to describe the language and to produce
teaching materials. It may be said that many of these scholars have been inspired
by the work of Bhattacharya (1977). The growing necessity of text books in the
secondary and tertiary levels also inspired the production of grammar books on
Bodo. The number of such books is rising every year. In this section we will select
a couple of representative works from the existing school grammars and
descriptive reference works and elaborate on their contributions. We will pay
particular attention to the extensiveness and accuracy of the descriptions of grammatical categories. However, we won’t make an attempt to review all the existing literature in Bodo here since most of them are written following same models of grammar.

2.3.1 School grammars

Works by the local Bodo scholars started in order to fulfill the need of providing textbooks to teach the Bodo language at Bodo Medium schools. A pioneering work, revised, reprinted and still taught at schools for teaching Bodo, is by Kamal Kumar Brahma, titled ‘Gwnang Raokhanthi’, first published in 1972. This textbook is designed to be taught to classes from eight to twelve. It covers a wide range of topics – including phonology, morphology, lexical classes and syntax of Bodo language. With respect to the verb, it talks about different types of verbs, such as finite vs. infinite, transitive vs. intransitive. He also talks about valence alternation, mood, and tense. However, as mentioned already, this work is written following both an Assamese grammar and English grammar model, and possibly a Hindi grammar. For instance, he talks about subtypes of nouns, such as material nouns, abstract nouns, collective nouns, and common nouns, among others. These subtypes of nouns are not lexical categories in Bodo; rather they are translations of categories found in commonly used English grammar books. He also talks about four gender categories in Bodo, which simply do not exist in the language. Gender distinction exists only in a few borrowed lexical items, such as $p^{\text{bagla}}$ ‘mad.male’ vs. $p^{\text{bagli}}$ ‘mad.female’ (from Assamese $\text{pogola}$ vs. $\text{pagoli}$). His treatment of the verb is also equally inadequate. For example, the notion of ‘transitive and intransitive verbs’ has nothing to do with transitivity, as it is understood in modern linguistics. Thus, the description of the grammatical categories is not scientific.

A more recent textbook on Bodo language for classes nine and ten is published by the Bodo Sahitya Sabha in 2013, titled ‘Jouga Boro Raokhanthi’. This school grammar covers phonology, lexical classes, morphology, and some syntax (voice, direct-indirect speech, etc.). The chapter on ‘verb’ includes discussion on verb types based on morphological composition, such as simple, complex and
compound, as well as based on syntactic distribution, such as transitive and intransitive verbs. It also talks about various causativization processes, finiteness of verbs, and tense. The influence of English grammar is still present even in this recent school grammar book, especially in the discussion of tense (see page 75).

In sum, there are still revisions to be made to the school grammar books in terms of what they teach about the Bodo language.

2.3.2 Descriptive works

There are short descriptions of the language by local Bodo scholars. One notable work is by Phukan Basumatary, titled ‘An Introduction to the Boro language’, and published in 2005. This work covers phonology and morphology of the language, but does not provide any description of the syntax. This work is linguistically more informed, except for a few glitches here and there. Basumatary’s treatment of verb morphology is rather sketchy, only nine pages long. Morphologically, verbs are classified into ‘simple’ and ‘complex’ verbs. The complex verbs subsume both morphologically complex verb stems and inflected verb forms. The formation of verb forms takes into account causative and some inflectional morphemes. There is no mention of adverbial suffixes in the treatment of verb morphology.

A more comprehensive morphological description of Bodo is found in a work by Aleendra Bharhma, titled ‘Modern Bodo Grammar’ published recently in 2013. Although it is called a grammar, it provides only morphological description of the language. This work provides a fifty pages long morphological description of the Bodo verbs, including a classification of the verbs. It provides descriptions of most of the inflectional affixes known to us and some of the ‘stem formative affixes’. Although the descriptions are quite simple and straightforward, some descriptions and categorizations, especially of verb, are superficial and inaccurate. For example, the distinction between so-called ‘regular’ and ‘irregular’ verbs is based on a faulty argument (see page 66-67). According to the author, the regular verbs take subjects of all persons, whereas the irregular verbs take subjects of only a certain persons, thus “all regular verbs can, grammatically, agree with all kinds of subjects”, and by extension the irregular verbs cannot. The author uses the term ‘grammatically’
to actually mean ‘semantic’, as we all know there is no verb agreement in Bodo. The distinction between regular and irregular verb is illustrated by lexical items such as p³ui ‘come’ vs. siri ‘fall’ (of leaves). The author argues that siri ‘fall’ cannot occur with 1st and 2nd person subjects, it takes only third person subjects, such as bilai ‘leaf’, because siri ‘fall’ denotes the falling of leaves only, while a verb like p³ui ‘come’ can take all subjects of all persons. This distinction is false, since we can equally argue that we cannot use bilai ‘leaf’, which is a third person subject, as a subject of p³ui ‘come’ for semantic reasons, because leaves do not commute. Thus, not all third person subjects can be the subject of the verb p³ui ‘come’, and therefore is no different than siri ‘fall’.


2.3.3 Dictionaries

Several Bodo scholars and some local non-Bodo scholars have written dictionaries. Here we will simply provide a list of work without trying to critically evaluate them since our primary focus is on grammar.

Rajendra Lal Narzary (1962) is a bilingual Bodo-Assamese dictionary. Halvorsrud and Maguram Moshahari (Eds.) (1968) is another bilingual Bodo-English dictionary published by the Boro Literature Board, Shillong. D. N. S. Bhat (1968) is an addition to the Bodo-English vocabulary forming the bulk of the book (pp. 37-176). The additional ‘grammatical sketch’ (pp. 1-36) includes brief sections on phonology (pp. 1-7) and morphophonemics (pp. 8-10) and a preface giving a detailed information about the demographic and ethnographic information of the speakers. Dharamdutt Tiwari (1973) is yet another bilingual Hindi-Bodo dictionary. Moniram Mochari (1985) is a Bodo-English dictionary. His work is impressively extensive, but not quite comprehensive. This dictionary has the great

2.4 Commonalities and differences of the three periods

Having looked at the available literatures on Bodo of all the three periods, namely Pre-Bhattacharya period, Bhattacharya period and post-Bhattacharya period, it is imperative to look at the commonalities and differences of the works on Bodo stretching over the three periods. It is evident that the purpose, approach and product of the works are all different in the three periods.

2.4.1 The purpose, approach and product of the pre-Bhattacharya period

The purpose of the work on Bodo by the European scholars was mainly to find out how close or different the language is from other languages in the area. So, their published works mostly contain vocabulary, outline grammar and ethnological information about the community as a part of their larger missionary goals. What we notice is that instead of adopting Tibeto-Burman perspective, they had adopted an approach based on Indo-European model to document the Bodo language. Though their works were not truly linguistics in proper sense of the term but rather anthropological, they started the pioneering work on Bodo as is the case with other languages in the area as well.

2.4.2 The purpose, approach and product of the Bhattacharya period

It is mentioned earlier (Section 2.2) that Bhattacharya’s work on Bodo has been the most comprehensive one was carried out within the framework of descriptive and functional linguistics. Unlike his predecessors, namely the European scholars, Bhattacharya’s purpose and approach are truly linguistic and academic in nature. He could realize the need of a serious linguistic study on Bodo and so, treats the language on its own right and provides an analysis which is still to a great degree
up to date. As a result, his product is a rigorous and most reliable linguistic
description on Bodo based on Tibeto-Burman perspective. His work inspired many
local scholars to work on Bodo. Bhattacharya, a non-native but fluent in Bodo, is
considered as the pioneer of the modern Bodo linguistics.

2.4.3 The purpose, approach and product of the post-Bhattacharya
period

As mentioned earlier (Section 2.3) the main purpose of the scholars’ work in the
post-Bhattacharya period has been educational. With the establishment of Bodo
medium schools and as a result of the recognition of Bodo as medium of
instruction, there came up an urgent need to publish literacy materials. So, many
grammar textbooks for different levels, namely primary, middle and secondary
have been written over the last four decades by local writers to serve the
pedagogical needs. What we have noticed, which is a matter of concern, is that the
local writers have not used the work of Bhattacharya as a basis for creating
teaching materials for Bodo. The lack of proper description resulted in the lack of
proper teaching materials.

2.5 Descriptive work on Bodo-Garo languages

We can see a spurt of activity in the description and analysis of Bodo-Garo
languages during the recent years. This began with Burling’s The Language of the
Modhupur Mandi (Garo) in 2004. This is a detailed and comprehensive descriptive
grammar of Garo. At almost the same time appeared François Jacquesson’s Le
deuiri: langue tibéto-birmane d’assam (2005), a grammar on Deuri. It was
followed by U.V. Joseph’s substantial Rabha Grammar (2007). And, recently
Seino van Breugel completed a grammar of Atong for his PhD dissertation (2008).
Jacquesson’s A Kokbork Grammar [Agartala dialect] (2008) is a short outline
grammar of the Kokborok language. Kazuyuki Kiryu’s An Outline of the Meche
Language – grammar, text and glossary (2008) is a sketch grammar of Meche as
spoken in Nepal. Among other scholars who are presently active in descriptive
analysis of the Bodo-Garo languages are Prof. Scott DeLancey and Krishna Boro
of the University of Oregon.
Regarding lexicographic documentation of Bodo-Garo languages, what we get to see is that it has lagged a bit behind grammatical description. Joseph has published (under the name U.V. Jose) an extensive *Rabha-English Dictionary* (2000), with tones marked. Santalal Meche and Kazuyuki Kiryu’s *Meche (Bodo)-Nepali-English Dictionary* (2012) is another authentic resource of one of the Bodo-Garo languages.

### 2.6 The variety under present study

As mentioned earlier (1.2.3) the data provided in this work are based on the standard variety of the language. However, we have also used data from other dialects particularly Kamrupia as spoken in the rural Kamrup and Sanzari as spoken in the erstwhile Darrang district, and shown illustrative examples wherever similarities have been found. These data presented here are collected mainly from Udalguri and Kokrajhar districts. Although Kokrajhar district is considered the major concentration of the speakers of the standard dialect, the migration over the years from those areas to several other districts has made the speakers scattered throughout Assam.

Wherever similarities have been found between Assamese and Bodo these examples will be highlighted by supplying examples. The decision to include such information has a long term objective: that of facilitating studies on the possible mutual influences between the two genetically distinct but geographically contiguous languages through a systematic comparison.