9 Concluding statement

9.0 Looking back

As a language of one of the prominent ‘Tribes’ in Northeast India, Bodo has always received more attention than the numerous other Tibeto-Burman languages since the beginning of research on Tibeto-Burman languages. From tiny sketch grammars to moderate descriptive works, from academic research to pedagogic language materials, Bodo has probably seen more work than any other Tibeto-Burman languages in Northeast India. Despite the existence of quite a bit of research on Bodo, it is the opinion of the current author among other linguists that there is a need of serious academic work which is empirically sound and based on ‘natural’ and stylistically diverse data. Moreover, it is time we change our approach to the study of a Tibeto-Burman language like Bodo, and treat the language on its own right instead of trying to impose the categories of English or Assamese.

The current work has been a part of such an effort – to provide a detailed description of one of the central aspects of Bodo language, namely the Verb, based on a sizeable corpus of ‘natural’ data which include both spoken and written language. The centrality of the Bodo verbs in Bodo morphosyntax is beyond any doubt. From the perspective of teaching Bodo to both Bodo and non-Bodo learners, an understanding of how the system of stem formation and verb inflection works is uncompromisable. A mere translation of Assamese or English grammatical categories into Bodo would rather confuse and distort than illuminate metalinguistic awareness of the learners. Moreover, the range of semantic and pragmatic information coded on the verb morphology makes verbs communicatively the most essential aspect of learning the language. From an academic point of view, Bodo is typologically near unique among the languages of Northeast India. Although languages like Garo, a closely related language of Bodo, has similar structure, Bodo takes it to an extreme in certain aspects, such as the existence of more than hundred Adverbial suffixes. Moreover, the inflectional system provides an interesting state of affairs in the history of any individual language. Many authors on Bodo morphosyntax, even some contemporary scholars, simply blindly assign categories to formatives which simply do not fit. The reason is simple – there is no systematic paradigm, which is what people expect to find, of verbal grammatical categories. Rather formatives with specific functions are loosely
organized into various positions which do not correlate to any specific grammatical
categories. DeLancey (2013) calls this stage of Bodo, including other Tibeto-Burman
languages, a ‘Creoloid language’, which is not the same as creole, of course. It is obvious
from historical context that Bodo was once a major lingua franca and consequently has
undergone a massive structural restructuring, due to which it has lost many of the archaic
features of Tibeto-Burman languages and acquired the loose agglutinating characteristic.

In order to fill the gap of an extensive work on such a significant aspect of Bodo
language and to present an alternative perspective to the current tradition of Bodo
linguistics, this work has undertaken the descriptive task and a pedagogic outlook on Bodo
verb. However, the author would like to emphasize that there is lot more about Bodo verbs
than this work could investigate, even when we have emphasized more on extensiveness
than on intensiveness. Moreover, extensiveness came, as usual, at the cost of the luxury of
in-depth investigation of certain areas of Bodo verb, in particular the Adverbial suffixes
and concatenations of TAM. What we hope to have achieved at least is to set a tone for the
future research, to put forward a framework of description which would produce useable
work which is methodologically sound and rigorous. Use of ‘natural’ data and analysis of
a language on its own right is something that we hope to see more in future research on
Bodo.

The current work has covered the central aspects of Bodo verbs. In chapter 3 we have
dealt with verb root, its phonological shape, borrowing, and the grammatical property of
transitivity. We have seen that the notion of transitivity cannot be directly applied to Bodo
verbs without certain modifications and other considerations. In other words, it is not as
straightforward as it is in some other languages like English. Lack of morphological
coding of transitivity, the variability in overt expression of verbal arguments, and the
variability in case marking, makes it difficult to distinguish a transitive verb from an
intransitive verb. However, the existence of causativizing processes which are applicable
only to intransitive verbs, an understanding of the case marking system (i.e. Differential
case marking), and an understanding of the use of anaphoric and non-anaphoric covert
expressions helps us distinguishing transitive verbs from intransitive verbs.

In chapter 4 we have looked at stem formation. What is worth noting about stem
formation in Bodo is the number of formatives that can take part in stem formation and the
variability in the order of their relative positions. We have identified majority of the
formatives and provided a brief description. There are certainly more to be discovered.
The question of relative ordering is still to be thoroughly investigated, and hopefully future research will take up on it.

**In chapter 5** we have looked at what we have called Inflectional morphemes. Bodo is rich in inflectional morphology, but it presents a descriptive problem. There are no distinct paradigms for verbal categories such as Tense, Aspect, Mode, and Modality. Rather everything that codes the functions of these grammatical categories is lumped into a single morphological position. Categorization of the inflectional morphemes into these grammatical categories is merely semantic and presentational. Another interesting aspect of the inflectional morphology is the concatenation of multiple inflectional morphemes to encode a meaning which is different than the compositional meaning of the morphemes. This required us to look into every possible combination and identify the gaps in such combinations in order to adequately describe the inflectional system. Once again we cannot claim to have identified all possible combinations and gaps in the combinations of verbal inflections. But we have certainly disentangled the myth of neat verbal categories, such as ‘present perfect continuous’ found in some contemporary descriptions.

**In chapter 6** we have talked about multi-verb constructions, such as Auxiliary verb constructions, Vector verb constructions, and Conjunct verb constructions. What is noteworthy about the multi-verb constructions is the parallelism between the Bodo multi-verb constructions and Assamese multi-verb constructions. Although the forms found in the Bodo multi-verb constructions are indigenous, the structures are very similar to those of Assamese. It is very likely that such structures in Bodo are contact induced.

**In chapter 7** we have talked about distribution of verb forms in various clause types, such as Independent clauses, Complement clauses, Adverbial clauses, Co-ordinated clauses, Chained clauses, and Relative clauses. What is noteworthy about the subordinate clauses such as Complement, Adverbial, and Relative clauses is the extensive use of nominalized structure and use of nominalized form of the verbs. This is of course one of the hallmarks of a Tibeto-Burman language.

With this kind of coverage of various aspects of Bodo verb, we present possible implications of our work for teaching Bodo verbs to students **in chapter 8**. This chapter provides a framework for teaching different aspects of Bodo verb to students in Bodo medium school. In the light of the current work, teachers will be more aware of how the system works and teaching will be more informed.
9.1 Looking ahead

Like any other research we have consciously delimited our area of investigation. As my advisor puts it, since we are more concerned with the trunk of the tree, we are refraining ourselves from climbing the branches. I would like to elaborate here briefly on what I believe can be investigated further on the Bodo verbs.

First, we believe that the main reason for the lack of systematic paradigms in the TAM system of Bodo is in the historical restructuring of Bodo morphosyntax due to intense contact. It is imperative that we look at the TAM system from a diachronic perspective as well. Only an internal reconstruction of the TAM system would enable us to understand how we arrived at the current stage of Bodo TAM system. It is apparent from the distribution of some of the TAM morphemes, such as the past tense marker -mun and the future tense marker -gun, that they have a different origin than other TAM markers such as -bai. We have been able to trace the history of the realis marker and copula don/duug and the influences its history has on its current distribution with other TAM markers. The other TAM markers do not have a readily identifiable source. Therefore, we can at least do an internal reconstruction and go back to a prior stage of the TAM system in order to make sense of the current TAM system. In this work we could not delve into the diachronic aspect of the TAM system.

Second, as my advisor reminds me from time to time that the investigation of an individual language of Assam in particular is incomplete unless we have an eye on the structure of the other languages in contact. This is particularly true of Bodo, as indicated here and there throughout this work. One of the realizations I had during the preparation of this work is how inter-connected the structures of Bodo and Assamese are – they are like two bodies but one soul. The forms are obviously unrelated, but the underlying structures are almost identical in certain areas of Morphosyntax. One of many examples is the auxiliary constructions containing the auxiliaries duug and t'e in Bodo. The first auxiliary has a copulative use meaning ‘to exist’, and the second auxiliary has a lexical source with the meaning ‘to stay, to live’. These two auxiliaries have a complementary distribution with regard to the inflectional possibilities on them. Assamese also have an auxiliary construction with two complementarily distributed auxiliaries as and t'ak, first one with a copulative use meaning ‘to exist’ and second one as lexical item meaning ‘to stay, to live’. In both languages, the auxiliary constructions express a progressive, continuative meaning. Another area where the two languages are invariably connected is the area of vector and conjunct verb constructions. We also have seen many parallelisms between Bodo and
Assamese in multi-clause constructions. We can certainly benefit from a contrastive study of the verbal system in Assamese and Bodo in understanding them better. This is another aspect in which the current work is lacking to our regret. We hope future research will look deeper in this area of studies.