Abstract

The present work is an attempt to provide a comprehensive description of the verb in Bodo, a Tibeto-Burman language spoken mainly in Assam in Northeast India. The purpose of this work is twofold. In the first place, this work aims to provide a good description of the Bodo verb that will be comprehensive enough to be of use to Tibeto-Burmanists on the one hand and to language typologists on the other. In the second place, taking the Bodo verb as a connecting point, this work attempts to address in the passing, certain pedagogic issue relating to the teaching of the Bodo language at school.

The majority of this work has been devoted to the description of the verb. The work encompasses a description of verbal roots, formation of verbal stems, ‘inflection’ of verbal stems, and distribution of various verb forms in different types of clauses, such as independent clauses, embedded clauses, and chained clauses. With respect to the verbal roots, we have tried to elaborate on various inherent properties of the verb root, such as their phonological shape, compounding, borrowing and the property of transitivity. As expected, most of the verb roots are monosyllabic. A few of the disyllabic roots are diachronically complex forms. The property of transitivity of Bodo verbs is not as straightforward as the previous literature on the area seems to suggest. The complexity lies mainly in the multi-functionality of the devices that code transitivity. Devices that usually code transitivity (or distinguish intransitive verbs from transitive ones) also have other semantic/pragmatic functions, such as topicality, focus, and the like. This is true about overt expression of arguments, case marking, and word order.

With respect to the formation of verbal stem, we have covered a wide range of verbal formatives and their order with respect to each other within the verb word. The formation of the verbal stems is the most extensive morphological process in Bodo. There are more than hundred formatives that take part in the formation of distinct verb stems. Additionally, the agglutinating nature of the verb stems
complicates the formation process even more. For instance, as many as nine or ten verbal formatives can be combined together in a verb stem. The inevitable question of how these formatives are ordered has never been previously addressed in the literature. Although it is not possible to enumerate all the possible combinations of more than hundred formatives in ten different positions, we can specify the following as a simple rule of thumb: formatives that are mostly lexically specific tend to occur closer to the root, while those that are more grammatical seem to occur further away from the root. This principle is akin to the typological principle of having derivational affixes closer to the root than the inflectional affixes. We have additionally provided (i) a list of formatives that always occur right next to the verb root and (ii) a list of commonly encountered combinations of verbal formatives.

With respect to the ‘inflection’ of verbs, we talk about the verbal morphology that is found obligatorily on the verb when it is used in a predication. What is striking about the inflectional morphology of Bodo is that we cannot sort the inflections into different verbal categories on morphosyntactic grounds. Thus, morphemes that code temporal information are not distinct in any way from the morphemes that code aspectual information, or modal information in distribution. Most of the elements of inflectional morphology occupy the first position relative to the root; only a couple of them are second, third, and fourth position morphemes. Although it is possible to characterise the later positions as a uniform category, the first position does not form any uniform semantic category. Therefore, we have organized the discussion of inflectional morphemes into various groups, such as tense, aspect, mode, mood, on semantic grounds for presentational purposes.

We also provide a description of three different types of complex verbal constructions – the auxiliary verb construction, the vector verb construction and the conjunct verb construction. We have identified one auxiliary verb construction (with regional and usage-based variants) and multiple vector and conjunct verb constructions. These constructions add to the functional richness of the verb complex by enabling it to express nuances which are quite subtle and yet very
expressive. While the auxiliary verb construction is fully productive, the vector and conjunct verb constructions vary in their productivity along a cline that ranges from very productive to very idiomatic expressions.

With respect to the distribution of the range of verb forms, we look at a wide range of clause types and observe which forms of the verb are found in each clause type. We provide a detailed description of independent clauses, coordinated clauses, complement and adverbial clauses of various types, chained clauses, and relative clauses. Besides the finite verb forms, we observe a range of verb forms such as nominalized verb forms, infinitival verb forms, and non-final marked verb forms in these clause types.

Finally, with reference to the morphosyntactic aspects of the Bodo verb, we provide a perspective on pedagogy. Here we talk about pedagogically appropriate course plans to help the curriculum designers design suitable curriculum, the teachers to teach the language with code emphasis, and the students to learn the language in a more efficient and systematic manner, particularly the morphosyntactic aspects of the Bodo verb.

The present study comprises nine chapters. These are as follows:

- Chapter One: Introduction
- Chapter Two: Literature review
- Chapter Three: The verb root
- Chapter Four: The verb stem
- Chapter Five: Verbal inflections
- Chapter Six: Complex verbal constructions
- Chapter Seven: Clausal constructions
- Chapter Eight: Pedagogy and the Bodo verb
- Chapter Nine: Concluding Statement

An overview of the structure and content of the work is given below.

CHAPTER ONE presents the scope and importance of the present work, provides background information to the language and the people, and lays down
the methods, various methodological considerations, inspirations and influences on this work. CHAPTER TWO presents a literature review on Bodo verbs. Works starting from Endle (1884) to contemporary works by local scholars are reviewed with special attention to the verb. CHAPTER THREE primarily deals with the verb root – its shape and size, compounding, borrowing, and the property of transitivity. This chapter also defines the category of verb in Bodo and provides typological information on verb in Tibeto-Burman and Bodo-Garo.

CHAPTER FOUR deals with the formation of stem by adding formatives to the root. Various types of formatives, such as causatives, versatile verbs, and adverbial suffixes are described in detail in this chapter. Moreover, the question of concatenation of verbal suffixes and the underlying organizational principle behind such concatenations are addressed in this chapter. CHAPTER FIVE deals with inflectional morphology – the kind of morphology that allows a stem to function as a predicator in a predication. This chapter describes a wide range of morphemes that indicates, time, internal organization, factuality, and speech act of verbal events. These have been treated under two broad categories - TAM and Mood. The question of whether Tense, Aspect, and Mode can be established as distinct and mutually exclusive categories is also briefly addressed.

CHAPTER SIX deals with complex verb constructions, such as auxiliary verb constructions, vector verb constructions, and conjunct verb constructions. CHAPTER SEVEN deals with clausal constructions. The primary goal of this chapter is to explore the range of verb forms found in various clause types, such as complement clauses, adverbial clauses, chained clauses, and relative clauses. CHAPTER EIGHT deals with pedagogic considerations on language teaching in the context of the teaching of Bodo verbs in particular. This chapter talks about linguistically sensitive curriculum design and code emphasis teaching of Bodo verbs. CHAPTER NINE is a statement concerning the work, and attempts an introspective assessment of the nature of contribution of the current work. It also remarks on some of the future directions that later scholars can pursue following the line of research undertaken in the present work.