

# CHAPTER 3

## Bodos and Bodo Language

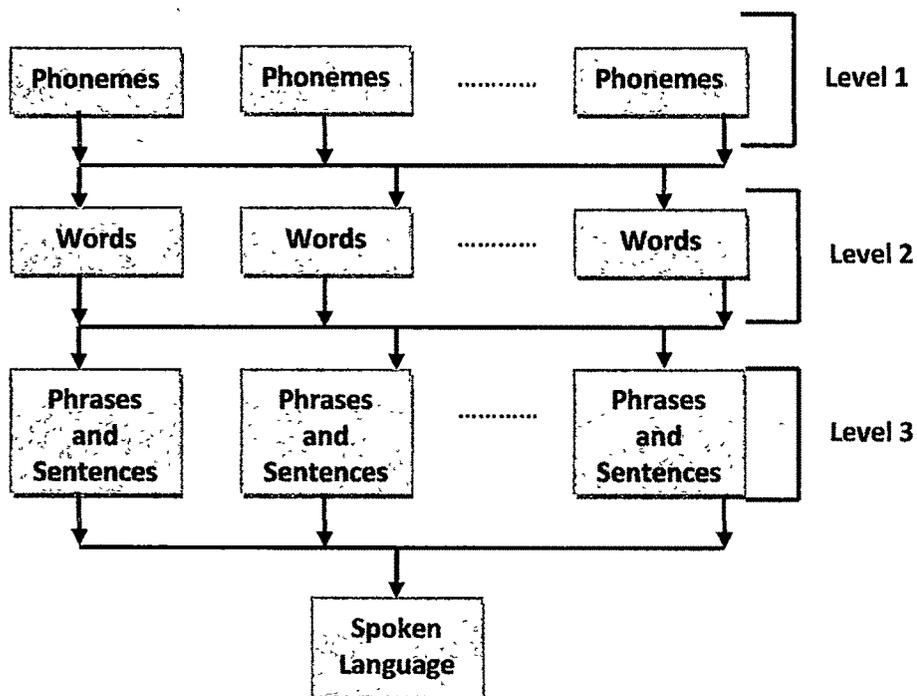
### 3.1 Introduction

Language is one of the methods for communication and the way of conveying information from one individual to another. Although, it is the easiest way of communication, but in reality, it is a complex phenomenon. The **body gesture, facial expression, spoken language** are also associated with language to give different semantics to it [50]. Modern language theories state that what we called language is the surface manifestation or interior representations of a common inner core (thought), which is not directly seen from outside, where the thought process occur [51]. Different utterances that a person uses are nothing more than a set of different interfaces between the processing result of that inner core and the community.

Spoken language is a subset of language, which conveys information backed up by the grammar and different other factors like **intonation, prosody** of a language to express its meanings.

The basic building blocks of a language are a set of characters known as **phonemes** which forms the **First Level**. It is interesting to note that the number of phonemes in any language never exceeds seventy [51]. This fact indicates a limit on the number of sounds a human can produce or distinguish in order to communicate efficiently. The **Second Level** of the building blocks of a spoken language consists of **words**. The words are build from sequentially concatenated

phonemes extracted from the basic sets of phonemes of the language. All the words in a language constitute a set called **vocabulary**. It has been agreed by experts across the world that a normal person understands and usages an average of 60,000 words [51] of his or her native language. The **Third Level** of the building block assembles the words into **phrases and sentences**. Thus phonemes are combining into words, words combines into phrases and sentences, phrases and sentences combine to form spoken language as shown in figure 3.0.



**Figure 3.0 : Hierarchy of Spoken Language**

Although, phonemes, words, phrases and sentences constitute a spoken language, but to give naturalness to a spoken language, some other factors are also responsible. The manner in which expressions are uttered is described by its **prosody**, which consists of a **characteristics stress, rhythm and intonation** of a sentence.

It is only under ideal conditions that the actual utterance of a word exactly follows the sequence of phonemes that defines the word. Normally, the phonemes are tempered, the vowels which are more difficult to pronounce are replaced by easier-to-pronounce ones, and the words are merged such that the ending phoneme of a word is merged with the starting phoneme of the following word. This phenomenon is known as **co-articulation**. This occurs because all utterances are produced by a physical system, which always tries to produce the desired output while minimizing the effort necessary to do that.

### **3.2 The Bodos**

The Bodos are one of the ethnic and linguistic communities and early settlers of Assam in North-East India. The word BODO denotes both the language as well as the community. The Bodos belong to a larger group of ethnicity called the Bodo-Kachari. Mythologically, according to Dr. Suniti Kumar Chatterjee, a well known historian, they are “The offspring of son of the Lord Vishnu and mother earth” who were termed as ‘Kiratas’ during the epic period. Though they are Mongolian people, the Bodos came to North-East India in 2000 BC.

### **3.3 Bodo Language**

**Bodo** (Devnagari : बोडो) (pronounced [bɔ̃ɔ]) is a language that belongs to the branch of Barish section under Baric division of the Tibeto-Burman language and spoken by the Bodo people of north-eastern India and some parts of Nepal. The language is one of the official languages of the Indian state of Assam, and is one of

the 22 scheduled languages that is given a special constitutional status in the year 2003. The language is closely related to the Dimasa language of Assam, the Garo language of Meghalaya and the Kokborok language spoken in Tripura.

The Bodo is the second major language of Assam [57], and official language in the Bodo dominated areas. Many rivers like Dihing, Dibru, Dihong, Dikrai etc. in the North-East region was named after some Bodo words which reveals the spatial distribution pattern of related ethno-cultural groups with their cultural traits and phenomenon.

The Bodo language was introduced as a medium of instruction in the primary school in Bodo dominated areas in 1963, which was the result of an intense socio-political movement carried out by different Bodo organizations since 1913. At present, the Bodo language is used as a medium of instruction upto the secondary level. The Bodo language has, to its credit, large number of Books, Books of poetry, drama, short stories, novels, biography, Travelogues, Children's literature and Literacy criticism.

The Bodo language is originated from the **SINO-TIBETAN** or **TIBETO-CHINESE** family [52]. The Sino-Tibetan family has various sub branches like "**Tibeto -Burmese**", "**Siamese - Chinese**", etc. of which "**Tibeto -Barman**" have been living in the North - East India. The "**Tibeto -Barman**" has four sub-branches called -"**Himalayan**", "**North - Assam**", "**Assam - Burmese**" and "**Tibetan**". The section "**Bodo - Naga**" and "**Burmese - Kuki - Chin**" is derived from "**Assam - Burmese**". The "**Bodo - Naga**" has two sub-sections viz. "**Bodo**" and

“Naga”. From the Bodo Section which includes ”Dimasa”, ”Garo”, “Rabha” , “Hajong”, “Mech”, “Lalung”, “Tipra”, “Chutia”, “Moran” came out as a separate language. The Bodo is most prominent among all the languages mentioned above within the Bodo group. The Bodo Language Hierarchy is shown diagrammatically in Figure. 3.1 [52].

In Assam, Bodo dominated area is commonly known as **Bodoland**. **Bodoland** is located in the north bank of river Brahmaputra in the state of Assam inhabited predominantly by a ethnic group speaking Bodo language. Currently the map of Bodoland includes the **Bodo Territorial Areas District (BTAD)**, administered by an autonomous “**Boroland Territorial Council**” (**BTC**). The map of Bodoland includes the Bodo Dominated districts of Kokrajhar, Baksa, Chirang and Udalguri in state of Assam. Currently the Head Quarter (Capital) of Bodoland is situated in Kokrajhar town.

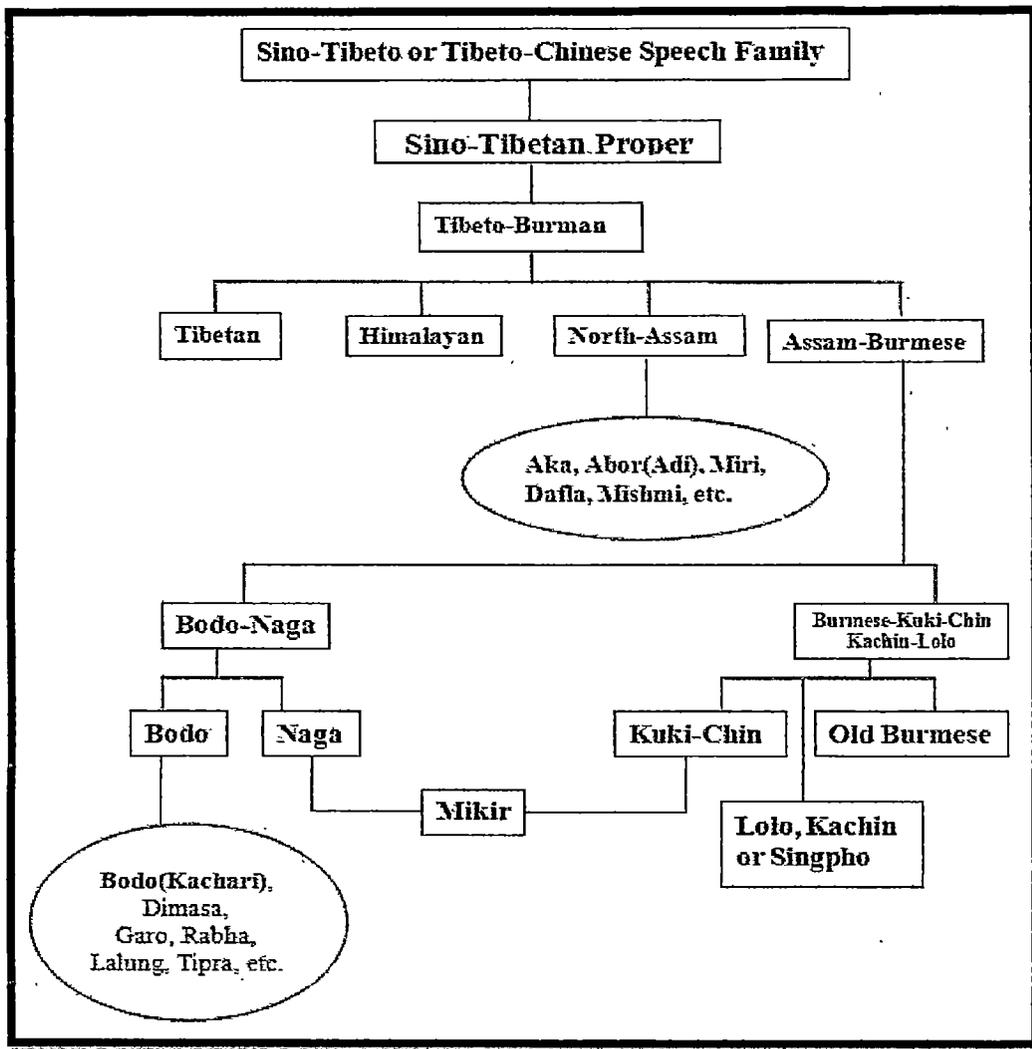


Figure 3.1: Hierarchy of Bodo language

### 3.4 Dialects in Bodo Language

According to Prof. P.C. Bhattacharya there are four dialects of Bodo [53].

They are

- The north-west dialect area which covers the northern regions of Goalpara and Kamrup district.
- The south-west dialect area, which covers South Goalpara, Garo Hills and few places of South Kamrup.

- The North Central Assam dialect area comprising of the district of Darrang, Lakhimpur and a few places of Arunachal Pradesh.
- The Southern Assam dialect area spoken in Nagaon, North Chachar and Mikir Hills, Cachar and adjacent areas.

### 3.5 Bodo Script

Till the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century, Bodo language did not have a script and it was mainly a spoken language. There is some evidence of using a kind of **Deodhai Script** by the **Bodo – Kachari Kings** in ancient times [53]. The first book of Bodo was published in 1915. This book was written in Bodo with Assamese Script.

After the Government of Assam has given recognition to Bodo Language as a medium of instruction upto the primary level in 1962, it gradually marched ahead in getting the status of a written language [55]. Initially, **Roman Script** and a kind of modified Assamese script known as **Purbalipi** were used to write the Bodo text books and literary works by Christian and non-Christian Bodos. In 1976, Bodo Sahitya Sabha, an apex body of Bodo literary forum, decided to take **Devnagari** script instead of Purbalipi for Bodo Language [55].

Bodo is bilingual because of various socio-economic, political and geographical reason. They use their native language to communicate with their own linguistic community and use other languages like Assamese, Hindi, Bengali to communicate with other communities. Bodo phonemes consists of the following phoneme classes:

- a) Segmental phonemes which consists of vowels and consonants, and

- b) Supra-segmental phonemes which consists of tone and juncture that co-occurs with vowels and consonants as extra sound features used in the language [52].

### 3.6 Phonology of Bodo Language

#### 3.6.1 Vowels

In Bodo there are six (6) pure vowels and two semi-vowels as shown in Table 3.0 and Table Table 3.2. Their occurrence characteristics are shown in Table 3.1

**Table 3.0 : Vowels in Bodo Language**

	FRONT	CENTRAL	BACK
HIGH / CLOSE MID	/i/ इ		/u/ उ /ɯ/ ओ
MID / CLOSE MID	/e/ ए		/ɔ/ अ
LOW / OPEN		/a/ आ	

**Table 3.1 : Occurrence of Bodo vowels at different position**

Vowels	IPA	Initially	Medially	Finally
इ	/i/	इनाइ	गिबि	बोराइ
उ	/u/	उन	गुसु	दखु
ए	/e/	एनजर	बे	बेसे

अ	/o/	अमा	-----	-----
ओ	/ɔ/	ओँखाम	जॉनि	बोलो
आ	/a/	आं	जाथाइ	आदा

### 3.6.2 Consonants

There are **sixteen (16)** consonant sounds including **two semi-vowels** in the Bodo language. The occurrences of these consonants are shown in **Table 3.2**

**Table 3.2 : Consonants in Bodo Language**

Consonant	IPA	Initially	Medially	Finally
फ	/p <sup>h</sup> /	/p <sup>h</sup> innai/ 'answer'	/lɔp <sup>h</sup> á/ 'a kind of vegetable'	/p <sup>h</sup> ap <sup>h</sup> / 'sin'
ब	/b/	/bima/ 'mother'	/àbàd/ 'crop'	/gàb/ 'colour'
थ	/t <sup>h</sup> /	/t <sup>h</sup> áŋ/ 'go'	/gát <sup>h</sup> á/ 'bell'	-----
द	/d/	/dùk <sup>h</sup> u/ 'sorrow'	/k <sup>h</sup> údúm/ 'kiss'	/zìràd/ 'thing'
ख	/k <sup>h</sup> /	/k <sup>h</sup> int <sup>h</sup> á/ 'tell'	/gũt <sup>h</sup> ar/ 'holy'	-----
ग	/g/	/gɔŋ/ 'horn'	/àgán/ 'footstep'	/zúg/ 'era'
म	/m/	/mègɔn/ 'eye'	/àmai/ 'maternal uncle'	/zũm/ 'wear'
न	/n/	/nai/ 'watch'	/zùnar/ 'beast'	/ɔn/ 'love'
ङ	/ŋ/	-----	/ũŋk <sup>h</sup> ám/ 'rice'	/ràn/ 'divide'
स	/s/	/sánsrí/ 'swim'	/àsán/ 'bangle'	/bis/ 'poison'

ज	/z/	/ziù/ 'life'	/bìzɯú/ 'top of tree'	/àɾɔz/ 'prayer'
ह	/h/	/háŋ/ 'breath'	/gàhàm/ 'good'	----
र	/r/	/rai/ 'scold'	/bɯrai/ 'old'	/guðr/ 'breadth'
ल	/l/	/lɔŋthɔŋ/ 'naked'	/ɔnlá/ 'curry of rice powder'	/nàŋguɹl/ 'plough'
य (semi vowel)	/w/	----	/guɹt <sup>h</sup> ar/ 'holy'	----
व (semi vowel)	/ɹ/	----	/muɹjə/ 'yesterday'	

### 3.7 Diphthongs in Bodo

Diphthong is a gliding monosyllabic speech sound that is started at or near the articulatory position of one vowel and moves towards the position of another. The diphthongs are produced by varying the vocal tract smoothly between the vowel configurations appropriate to the diphthong. The group of sounds that are occurred due to the gliding transition in vocal tract area between adjacent phonemes are called **semi-vowels** because of their vowel like nature. Thus the acoustic properties of these sounds are strongly influenced by the context in which they occur. Bodo has sufficient numbers of diphthongs which are shown in the **Table 3.3:**

**Table 3.3 : Diphthongs in Bodo Language**

<b>Diphthong</b>	<b>Example</b>
/ai/	ai (mother)
/eo/	eo (to fly)
/ou/	ou (yes)
/iu/	thiu (suddenly)
/ua/	rua (axe)

### **3.8 Tones in Bodo Language**

Bodo is one of the **Tonal languages** of the world. There are **two** clearly distinguishable kinds of tone in Bodo [56]; these are **Low** and **High**. As a common system the **low tone is marked by an acute accent ( / )** and the **high tone by a grave accent ( \ )** over the vowels of the syllable where the particular tones occur.

### **3.9 Word order in the Language**

The basic word order of the Bodo language is **SOV (Subject-Object-Verb)**. But, as it has rich case system all other kinds of word order i.e. **SVO, OSV, OVS, VOS** and **VSO** can realize the same meaning which an SOV structure can. Out of them OSV is more frequently found in the native speakers' speech.

### 3.10 Syntactic structure in Bodo Language

Structurally, syntax in Bodo Language has three forms. They are simple, complex and compound. The general syntactic structure is of the form S-O-V pattern. It is found that the word order is flexible and is based on the context and mood of the speaker. The language has idiomatic and non-idiomatic use of sentences. It has also the use of verb and verb less sentences.

### 3.11 Prosody of Bodo Language

Prosody is defined in the Longman dictionary as “**The stress & intonation patterns in the language**”. The acoustic correlates of prosody, also known as prosodic features, include **pitch, duration, loudness and stress**. Prosodic signals convey two sets of information, **Firstly**, they convey speaker characteristics that define a person’s individual voice characteristics and perhaps even his/her sociological, and geographical/national background. It can also be used for sex identification purpose. **Secondly**, they carry expression, emotion, intention and meaning.

#### Prosody example

The **capital letters (BOLD FACE)** indicate **stress (Accented)** and the **small letters indicate unstressed (Un-Accented)**

(i) **One Accented syllable between two unaccented syllables:**

**English:** The **CUR**/few **TOLLS**/ the **KNEEL**/ of **PART**/ing **DAY**.

**Bodo (Example ) :**

(You should always come from home:)

nwnɡ/sw/rw sAn/p<sup>h</sup>rwm/bw no/ni/p<sup>h</sup>rAy p<sup>h</sup>w/t<sup>h</sup>Ar/dw

(ii) An Unaccented syllable followed by an accented syllable;

English: A SLUM/ber DID/my SPR/it STEAL.

Bodo : (Both this and that are equal: bi/zwnɡ/ be/zwnɡ/ so/mAn/ )

(iii) An Accented syllable followed by an unaccented syllable:

English: WEL/come WILD North/EASter

Bodo : (Don't cry brother: /dA/gAb /p<sup>h</sup>ong/bAi)

(Siva is the lord of earth: sibA mulug swrzi giri)

(iv) Two Accented syllables, used for emphasis:

English: RANGE, RANGE/ aGAINST / the DY/ ing OF / the LIGHT

Bodo : (Finish the drink quickly: /go/ /go/ /gA/ /gA/ /lwng/)

(v) One Accented syllable followed by two unaccented syllables:

English: HALF a league / HALF a league / HALF a league.

Bodo : ( He is the best ruler: /bi/t<sup>h</sup>AngyA /mw/zAngsin /beng/giri)

(vi) Two Unaccented syllables followed by one Accented syllable:

English: There was RA / cing and CHA/ ing on CANN / obie LEA .

Bodo: (Who is here? : bej hay/ swr/)

(What is this? : bi yw /mA/)

(vii) One Accented syllable between two unaccented syllables:

English: The DAYS of / our YOUTH are / the DAYS of / our GLORY.

Bodo: (The college days are the most memorable days.: k<sup>h</sup>o/lez/ni som/p<sup>h</sup>rA/nw  
boy/ni/k<sup>h</sup>ruigw/sw/yAj lA/t<sup>h</sup>Aj/sin)

### 3.12 Intonation

The term intonation refers to conveying information in speech being independent of the words and their sounds. Modulation of pitch is central to intonation. Intonation is often thought of as the use of pitch over the domain of the utterance. The patterning of pitch in speech is so closely bound to patterns of timing and loudness, and sometimes voice quality, that we cannot consider pitch in isolation from other dimensions. It can also reflect the structure of information in utterances, highlighting constituents of importance. In Bodo, words are distinguished not only by vowels and consonants but also by the use of a limited set of distinctive pitch patterns or heights on each syllable. That is why Bodo is called a **tonal language**. **Table 3.4** represents some typical intonational pattern in Bodo language.

**Table 3.4 : Some Typical Intonational Pattern in Bodo Language**

Serial no.	Sentences	Context words to clarify the meaning
1	/वे/ खामानिखौ नौ मावदौ हजना आपुडाखै	(I didn't say that you have done <b>this</b> work) but rather some <b>other</b> work
2	वे /खामानिखौ/ नौ मावदौ हजना आपुडाखै	(I didn't say that you have done <b>this work</b> ) you may have taken some

		<b>industry</b>
3	वे खामानिखौ नौं /मावदों/ हजना आबुडाखै	(I didn't say that you have done this work) I think someone <b>did</b> it
4	वे खामानिखौ नौं मावदों /हजना/ आबुडाखै	(I didn't say that you have done this work) may be you just <b>borrowed</b> it
5	वे खामानिखौ नौं मावदों हजना /आ/ बुडाखै	(I didn't say that you have done this work) I only <b>suggeste</b> d the <b>possibility</b>
6	वे खामानिखौ नौं मावदों हजना /आ/ बुडाखै	(I didn't say that you have done this work) Some one <b>else</b> said it
7	वे खामानिखौ नौं मावदों हजना आबुडाखै/	(I didn't say that you have done this work) <b>that's</b> not true at all