

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **STUDY ON BODO LANGUAGE**

#### **Chapter overview:**

- Introduction to BODO Language
- The History of the Bodo community
- Linguistic Affiliation of the Bodo community
- Bodo Scripts
- Bodo phonology
- Bodo language Tones

## CHAPTER 5

### STUDY ON BODO LANGUAGE

#### 5.1 Introduction to BODO Language:

Boro / **বর** / word not only denotes the language, it also specifies the community, and is uttered with a high tone on the last syllable / **বর** / compared to the first syllable / **ব**/. Dialects spoken in the north-eastern India can be broadly divided into three primary groups:

- Western Boro dialect [WBD] (Swnabari)- dominant in the districts of Kokrajhar and Bongaigaon districts.
- Eastern Boro dialect [EBD] (Sanzari) - spoken mainly in the districts of Barpeta, Nalbari and Kamrup and some parts of Darrang district as well.
- Southern Boro dialect [SBD] (Hazari)- Speakers are found in areas of Nowgong, district of North Cachar, Mikir Hills and few adjoining localities.

The Western Boro dialect has been accorded the status of Standard Dialect, and it has got written form. The variations among dialect groups are basically phonological and lexical. In his book “A Descriptive Analysis of the Bodo Language” Historian P. C. Bhattacharya concludes that in Bodo 4 dialects-areas are clearly visible showing enough variations in speaker’s dialect mentioned below:

1. North-West area: Comprises northern regions of Goalpara and Kamrup district of Assam.
2. South-West area: Coprises South Goalpara, Garo Hills and a few places of south Kamrup of Assam.

3. North-Central area: Comprises Darrang and Lakhimpur districts of Assam and portion of states of Arunachal Pradesh.
4. Southern Assam area: Comprises Nowgong and North Cachar districts and Mikir Hills and few adjoining localities.

**Geographical Location:** The Brahmaputra Valley in Assam gets primary concentration of Bodo speakers. New Jalpaiguri (West Bengal) is another place where Bodo inhabitants reside along with its adjoining places.

**Speaker population:** In 2001 Bodo speaking community extends their number up to 12,96,162 compared to previous 1991 census report where count was 11,84,569, against an overall count of 1,350,478 in entire India suggested by 2001 national census.

**Phonemic Inventory:** There are sixteen consonant phonemes including two semi-vowels and six vowel phonemes in the Bodo. Phoneme is the basic construct of any written language. A language must have written form expressed in terms of own set of phonemes with separable characteristics. Phonemes contain inherent specifications in articulation, acoustic utterance, and perception based attributes that separate languages from each other. The sense of vibratory feeling caused by air pressure on human tympanic membrane carries same effect for unique phoneme. Thus unique phonemes carry same audio no matter who is the utterer. This abstract feel known as phoneme, audio version is termed to be allophone/phone divided into two branches: Articulatory phonetics and acoustic phonetics.

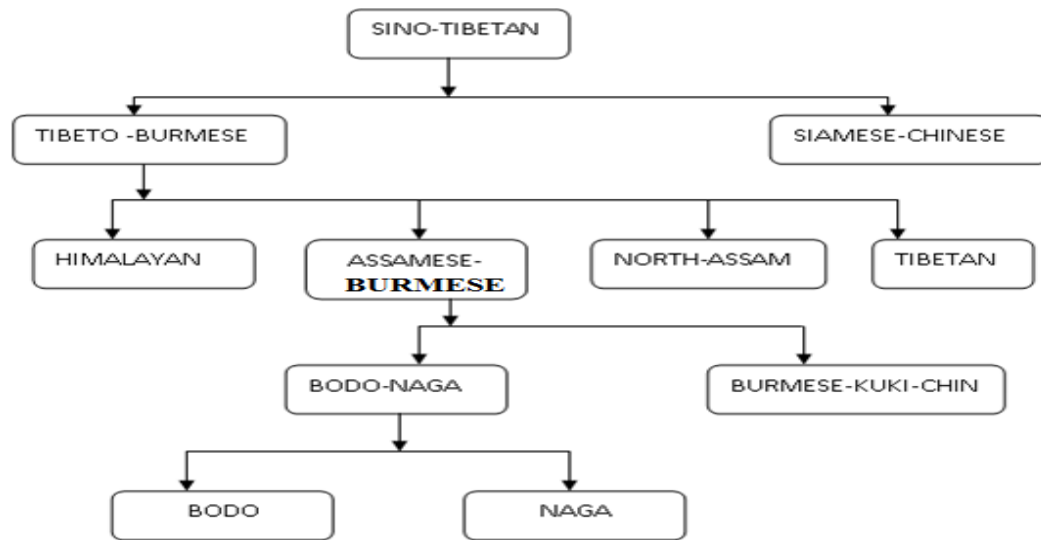
We utter a voice signal combining vowel (s) and consonant (s) generated by articulation properties comprising vocal cord and tract. Two inherent properties

namely temporal and spectral are time varying. The features of articulation gets manipulated by applied emphasis, rate of speech etc.

**5.2: The History of the Bodo community:** The Bodo people are one of the early ethnic and linguistic communities settled in the North-Eastern part of India. The Bodo-Kachari is the super set for Bodo community. Race wise Bodos are included in Mongoloid group of the Indo-Tibetans/Indo-Mongoloids. If we go back to the Mythological age, historian Dr. Suniti Kumar Chatterjee, writes that the Bodos are “the Offspring of son of Vishnu and mother Earth”, named Kiratas in the epic era. Bodos have earned plain tribe category in the sixth schedule of Indian constitution. Historically, there are different views on the early migration of the Mongolian into the North-Eastern part of India. Some of them are:

According to Grierson’s “The Linguistic Survey of India”, the Mongolian settled in old Assam, migrated from Hoang-Ho and Yangtze River banks and scattered and dwelt in different river banks of the state. The upper course of the Yangtze and Hoang-Ho in the North-West China were the original home of the Tibeto-Burman races [210]. As written by Rajmohan Nath, several clusters from the North progressed toward Himalayan valley. They were the primitive people of the area north to the Himalayas and West China- “ Bod” i.e. Bodos meaning “The first dwelling place or homeland. “ in tibetan language. Rev. Sidney Endle, describes the origin of Bodos and Kacharis as a race is a matter of conjecture and inference. In features and general appearance they can be closely resemble with the Mongolian Group of people. This might point the original homeland of the Kachari (Bodo) race, as Tibet and China.

The hierarchy of Bodo community is presented below:



**Figure 5.1: Hierarchy of Bodos**

**5.3 Linguistic Affiliation of Bodos:** The Bodo language belongs to the Tibeto-Burman language family, which is a sub-group of the Sino-Tibetan language group. It is one of the popular Indian tribal languages.

As a result of several causes very rapid development is not seen in Bodo language development. Evidence of written form of Bodo goes back to ending of 19<sup>th</sup> century and beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century. One of the important factor that can be figured out from literary studies which attributed to the slow development of the Bodo language have strong historical evidences that though Bodo Rulers (namely Raja Iragdao, Sikhwna Jwhwlau, Swmdwn Jwhwlau, Gambari Sikhla, Birgwsri Sikhla etc) were efficient rulers, they (administration) took no such steps which would have contributed to their mother tongue. It causes Bodo fall prey to dialects changes and division in sub-languages. Ultimately a sizable community got separated to smaller divisions like Bodo, Garo, Rabha, Tiwa, Sonowal, Karbi, Dimasa, Kokborok, Mishing and Chutiya etc. This also indicates to a very crucial fact that mother language is a huge factor of unity.

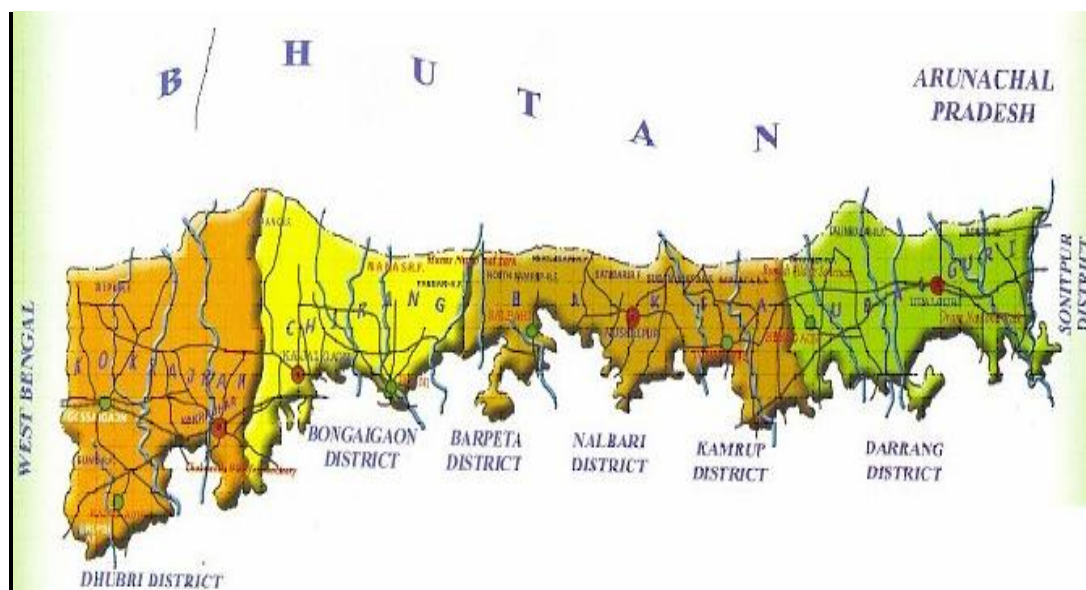
Good time arrived for Bodo in early 20<sup>th</sup> century; a plethora of developmental activities along with awareness of the importance of their mother tongue among the speakers influences the Bodo language in positive direction. Ethnic Bodo organizations started a mass movement for the welfare and recognition of the language. Subsequently in 1963, the Bodo language was introduced in the primary school levels of the Bodo dominated areas as medium of instruction. Later in 2005, Bodo earned recognition in Indian constitution by establishing 22<sup>nd</sup> scheduled languages of India. The Bodo language has got the status of one of the official languages of the state of Assam.

**5.4 Scripts:** The Bodo language had no standard form of writing till 1953. It had a history of using Deodhai, Roman and Assamese scripts. Presently, Bodos have adopted the Devanagari script. But, there is a huge difference in the usage of the letters in Bodo language from the Devanagari script. In terms of phonology, morphology, syntax, and vocabulary Bodo shares some commonalities to other languages in their group. Bodo demonstrates similarities with the Dimasa language (Assam) and with the Garo language (Meghalaya), and with Kokborok (Tripura) too. It important to note that, present Bodoland autonomous territory Bodo in its pure form is spoken in Udalguri only (out of four districts Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksa and Udalguri). There has been a great influence noticed on Bodo language from Assamese and Bengali languages.

**5.5 Morphological characteristics of Bodo Language:** The morphological feature of Bodo language can be divided into two basic categories: primary and secondary grammatical categories. Primary consists of Noun, Pronoun, Verb, Adjective, Adverb, Conjunction and Interjection. Secondary consists of Number, Gender,

Person, Case and Case-Endings, Numerals and Numeral Classifiers and Tense. Noun has basic, derived as well as compound form composed of noun and verb, verb and noun as well as noun and noun. Pronoun has five different categories. Verb has simple, complex and compound as well as transitive, intransitive, causative, finite and infinite based on structure and function. Adjective has basic and derived form and its basic foundation is verb. Adverbs are basically derived from the adjectives by using derivational suffixes. Numbers are two in this language and are inflected basically with nouns, pronouns also with adjectives. The Bodo language has two genders i.e. masculine and feminine. Traditionally common and neuter are also used. It has three different phases of gender formation. It has three persons: 1st, 2nd, 3<sup>rd</sup>. These persons are used in association with personal pronoun.

**5.6 Bodoland Territory:** In north-east part of India Bodo people are available in all areas: Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Mizoram, Manipur, Tripura, Northern part of West Bengal, Bihar, and adjoining areas of Bangladesh, Nepal, and Bhutan. The present Bodoland territory is shown in figure 2.



**Fig 5.2: Bodoland Territory**

**5.7 Bodo Phonology:** There are six pure vowels (monophthongs) and nine vowel glides or diphthongs in Bodo language. Following tables 5.1(A,B,C) lists out Bodo pure vowels, compound vowels and their occurrence with suitable examples.

Table 5.1(A): 6 Bodo pure vowels

	Front	Central	Back
High / close mid	इ /i/		उ /u/, औ /a <sup>w</sup> /
Mid / close mid	ए /e/		अ /o/
Low / open	आ /a/		

Table 5.1(B): Compound Bodo Vowels (4) with their Occurrence and word example

Four (4) Bodo compound vowels with their I.P.A. representation	Bodo language use	Bodo word example using compound vowels
ो, ु; <i>u, u</i>	ओ	ओवा, गेबौ <i>uuva, gubuu</i>
ी, ि; <i>u, i</i>	ऐ	ऐ, आगै <i>ui, agui</i>
े, अ; <i>e, o</i>	एव	एव Ev
ािी; <i>a i u</i>	आयौ	आयौ <i>ayuu</i>

Table 5.1(C): Occurrences of Pure Bodo Vowels

Bodo vowels	Initial position	English meaning	Medial position	English meaning	Final position	English meaning
अ /o/	ɔnzal	Beloved	bɔn	Fire wood	zɔ	To sit
आ /a/	arw	And	t <sup>h</sup> ar	True	bip <sup>h</sup> a	The father
इ /i/	inzur	The wall	bir	To fly	gi	The fear
ए /e/	Em	Bed	ber	Blast	ze	Nest
उ /u/	Undu	Sleep	k <sup>h</sup> ur	Inching	gu	To uproot
औ /a <sup>w</sup> /	unjk <sup>h</sup> am	Rice	sum	To blacken	guisu	To mind

The vowel sounds in Bodo language occur in all the three positions i.e. initially, medially and finally. Examples are shown in the following table 5.1(D):



Table 5.1(D): Articulatory position of Bodo vowels with I.P.A. &amp; manner

Vowels & I.P.A.	BORO EXAMPLES In three positions in a word						Articulatory placement with manner
	Initial	English meaning	Medial	English meaning	Final	English meaning	
अ /o/	अमा oma	A pig	—	—	—	—	High, front, unrounded
आ /a/	आं aŋ	I, me	जा zat <sup>h</sup> ai	The incident	आदा ada	The elder brother	High, back, rounded
इ /i/	इनाइ inai	The evil	गिबि gibi	First	बोराइ Burai	Old	Mid, front, unrounded
ए /e/	एनजर enzor	The rabbit	बै be	This Or It	बेसे bese	How much?	Mid, back, rounded
उ /u/	उन्दु undu	To sleep	गुसु gusu	The cold	दुखु dukhu	The Sorrow	High, back, unrounded
औ /a <sup>w</sup> /	ओखाम uŋk <sup>h</sup> am	The rice	जोनि zuŋni	Ours	बोलो buɽu	To force	Low, central unrounded

Table 5.1(E): Occurrences of Diphthongs in Bodo

Bodo Diphthongs	Use In Initial Position	English Meaning	Use In Medial Position	English Meaning	Use In Final Position	English Meaning
Ai	Ainà	The mirror	Dainà	Witch (male)	mai	Paddy
ɔi	—	—	rɔinà	farming instrument	gɔi	betel nut
Ui	—	—	Duisín	Smaller	àŋnik <sup>h</sup> ruí	than me
ui	—	—	k <sup>h</sup> uìnà	bride	muí	The deer
Iu	—	—	Ziùma	The soul	ziù	The life
Au	Aùma	Insect type	Zaùn	The effect	laú	To Lengthen
Eu	Eúnai	To fry	Meuà	Bamboo shoot	k <sup>h</sup> eù	To untie
uu	uùà	bamboo	huùà	A male	zuù	Beer of rice

There are sixteen consonants in Bodo language including two semi vowels. Here is a list (table 5.2) of the consonants along with word using them along with their meaning and articulatory way and place of articulation.

Table 5.2: 16 Bodo Consonants with example and description of articulatory nature.

Phonemes	Example	Meaning	Description
[p <sup>h</sup> ]	p <sup>h</sup> u	To un root	Unvoiced bilabial aspirated stop
[t <sup>h</sup> ]	ban <sup>h</sup> a	Prize	Unvoiced alveolar aspirated stop
[k <sup>h</sup> ]	k <sup>h</sup> a	To pluck	Unvoiced velar aspirated stop
[b]	haba	Marriage	Voiced bilabial non-aspirated stop
[d]	abad	Cultivation	Voiced alveolar non-aspirated stop
[g]	gab	To weep	Voiced velar non-aspirated stop
[m]	k <sup>h</sup> amp <sup>h</sup> a	Pillar	Voiced bilabial nasal consonant
[n]	Mini	To smile	Voiced alveolar nasal consonant
[ŋ]	Ra ŋ	Money	Voiced velar nasal consonant
[s]	Hus	Sense	Unvoiced alveolar fricative consonant
[z]	zrab	Suddenly	Voiced alveolar nasal
[h]	gwhw	Power	Voiced pharyngeal fricative
[r]	abru	Prestige	Unvoiced alveolar rolled consonant
[l]	zebla	When	Voiced lateral consonant
[w]	huwi	Un rubbed	Voiced bilabial frictionless continuant
[j]	siji	Not wet	Voiced palatal frictionless continuant

Table 5.3: Bodo Consonants as per Manner, Articulatory way & example demonstration.

Bodo consonants	Words in Bodo language with consonants in different positions						Articulatory manners with place
	Initial position	English meaning	Medial position	English meaning	Final position	English meaning	
ख k <sup>h</sup>	खरम k <sup>h</sup> orom	Sleeper of wood	गोखा guk <sup>h</sup> a		—	—	—
ग g	गथ gotho	A child or boy	गोगोम gugum	Very big	—	—	Velar aspirated unvoiced stop
ङ ŋ	—	—	जांख्ला zaŋk <sup>h</sup> la	Ladder	आं aŋ	I, me, myself	Velar, Unaspirated voiced stop
थ t <sup>h</sup>	थरखा t <sup>h</sup> ork <sup>h</sup> a	A bamboo made instrument	फिथाइ p <sup>h</sup> it <sup>h</sup> ai	Fruits	—	—	Velar nasal

द d	दर Dor		आदा ada		बेसाद besad	Item	Alveolar aspirated
न n	नडा noɽa	Not	गनथं gonthoɽ	The nose	मेगन megon	The eye	Retroflex unaspirated
फ p <sup>h</sup>	फराय p <sup>h</sup> oray	To read	गुफुर gup <sup>h</sup> ur	White colour	—	—	Alveolar nasal
ब b	बोदाइ burai	Old	दुब्रि dubri		गोबाब gwbab	Salty test	Bilabial aspirated unvoiced stop
म m	मोदाइ mɔdai	God	गोमो gomu	Yellow	रोदोम rudum	To grow	Bilabial unaspirated voiced stop
र r	रोखा ruk <sup>h</sup> a	Distance	बोराइ burai	Old	हर hor	Night	Bilabial nasal
ल l	ला la	To take	बोलां bulaɽ	To pull	जोखोल zɔɽkhɔɽ	Bright	Alveolar trill
ज z	जा za		रोजा ruza		—	—	Alveolar lateral
स s	सान san		मोसा musal		रेस res		Denti alveolar
ह h	हर hor		दाहार dahar		—		Alveolar fricative
य y	—	—	दायना dayana		गय goy	Bittle nut	Glottal fricative
व v	—	—	मेवाइ mevai		गेव gev	To open	Palatal

### 5.8 Bodo Language Tones:

Bodo is a tonal language. A single word may convey different meaning depending on the speaker's stress and tone. The two tones visible are Low tone and High tone. Depending on the tone a single word may convey separate meaning, which exists in very few languages around the world. Generally acute accent represents high tone whereas a grave accent represents a low tone over the vowels of the syllable where

the particular tones occur. Some examples are depicted below with suitable Bodo words:

<b>Bodo Word Conveying Separate Meanings Depending On The Speaker's Tone</b>			
<b>Voiced in low tone</b>	<b>Meaning</b>	<b>Voiced in high tone</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
/zà /	To happen	/zá /	To eat
/Sèŋ/	To respond	/séŋ /	Decrease in number
/hù/	To give	/hú /	To hasten
/saù /	Curse	/saú /	To roast
/gaù/	Shoot	/gaú/	Divide equally
/zuù/	Beer of rice	/zuú/	Century
/Baì/	To purchase	/Baí/	To break

**Chapter summary:** In this chapter we discussed the detailed background, history and other significant facts related to Bodo language.