

LANGUAGE IN INDIA

Strength for Today and Bright Hope for Tomorrow

Volume 12 : 1 January 2012

ISSN 1930-2940

Managing Editor: M. S. Thirumalai, Ph.D.

Editors: B. Mallikarjun, Ph.D.

Sam Mohanlal, Ph.D.

B. A. Sharada, Ph.D.

A. R. Fatihi, Ph.D.

Lakhan Gusain, Ph.D.

Jennifer Marie Bayer, Ph.D.

S. M. Ravichandran, Ph.D.

G. Baskaran, Ph.D.

L. Ramamoorthy, Ph.D.

Phonological Variation of Lexical Items in Bodo and Dimasa A Brief Note

Pratima Brahma, M.A., Ph.D. Scholar

Abstract

Ethnically, Bodo and Dimasa are of Mongoloid origin and their languages belong to the Bodo sub-section of the Bodo-Naga section under the Assam-Burmese group of the Tibeto-Burman branch of Sino-Tibetan or Tibeto-Chinese language family (Grierson 1903). The Tibeto-Burman group of languages have close affinities with languages like Bodo, Garo, Kok-Borok, Lalung, Sonowal, Rabha, Mech, Deori, etc. Among them, Bodo, Dimasa and Kok-Borok are closer to each other than other languages of the group as far as their lexical items are concerned. However, in this paper, phonological variation of the Bodo and Dimasa will be discussed and other Tibeto-Burman languages are not covered at all.

The phonemic features of Bodo and Dimasa are analyzed in this paper by taking similar lexical items into consideration. The specimens present a number of features in respect of vowels, semi-vowels, consonant and stress-accent. These are described under the headings of vowel shifting,

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

12 : 1 January 2012

Pratima Brahma, M.A., Ph.D. Scholar

Phonological Variation of Lexical Items in Bodo and Dimasa - A Brief Note

vowel deletion, consonant deletion, voicing, devoicing, vowel deletion, consonant deletion, monophthongisation, etc.

Introduction

North-East region of India is bounded by the political boundary of China in the North, Bhutan in the West, Bangladesh in the East and Burma (Myanmar) in the South. It comprises of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura. Of these, Assam is the biggest state (as per land area) in this region consisting of Brahmaputra Valley and Barak Valley. In Assam, languages belonging to different language families are found, namely Indo-Aryan and Tibeto-Burman.

Bodo and Dimasa are one of the major tribal communities of Assam and they constitute an important ethnic group in North-East India. For the common people, there is no difference between Bodo and Dimasa. It may be, either Bodo was Dimasa's dialect or Dimasa was Bodo's dialect. According to G. A. Grierson 'the European called the Dimasas Hill Kacharis to distinguish them from the plains Kacharis speaking Bodo'. In 1971 the Government of India recognized them as separate ethnic groups as Bodo and Dimasa.

The Language and the People

Bodo

Bodo is the name of the language as well as of a community. The word *Bodo* was first used by Hodgson in 1846. It is the major tribe of Eastern and North-Eastern India. It is a branch of Tibeto-Burman language family. The Bodo is known as Bodo, Bodd, Boddo, Boro, Kachari, Kirata, or other variations in different places at different point of time. According to Suniti Kumar Chatterjee (1951) and Kalaguru Bishnu Prasad Rabha, the word Bodo or Boddo is derived from the word 'BOD' which means "land or country". But according to Bakul Chandra Basumatary (Bodo Civilization in India, 2009) the word Boddo or Bodo is derived from the Prakrit word "Bodh" or Badh" which means "sense or knowledge". In course of time, they came to be known as simply Bodo-Bodo-Boro. The speakers of Bodo are found mainly in the Kokrajhar, Darrang, Goalpara and Kamrup district of Assam and some adjacent areas of West

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

12 : 1 January 2012

Pratima Brahma, M.A., Ph.D. Scholar

Phonological Variation of Lexical Items in Bodo and Dimasa - A Brief Note

Bengal, Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan. According to 2001 census of India the total population of Bodo speakers in Assam are 13, 15,771.

Dimasa

Dimasa is the name of language as well as of a community. It is the one of the major Kachari tribes of Assam and they constitute an important ethnic group in Northeast India. Ethnically, the Dimasas are mongoloid origin, and their language belongs to Tibeto-Burman language family. The term 'Dimasa' itself is a compound word (di 'water' + ma 'great' + sa 'children') which literally meant 'children of big river', which may be the Dhansiri. There have been different theories put forward by different scholars for the origin of the terms 'Dimasa'. According to Edward Gait (1967), the Dimasa are called Timisa by the Ahoms, which is a corruption of the term 'Dimasa'. But according to Sonaram Thaosen (1994), before coming to Dimapur 'Dimasa' called themselves 'Bodosa'. They come to be known as 'Dimasa' only after arriving at Dimapur. In the view of Thaosen, 'Dimasa' refers to the people residing at the bank of the river 'Dima'. Thaosen further opines that although the Dimasas did use to live by the bank of the river Bramhaputra, actually they are 'the children of Dima', that is, the 'Dhansiri' river.

According to Nirupoma Hagzer, (1972), it is a common practice among the Dimasas to introduce themselves by adding 'sa' with the name of their origin place. The speakers of Dimasa are mainly found in the District of the North-Cachar Hills, (at present Dimahasao) in Assam. They are also found in small scattered groups in the district of Cachar, Hailakandi, Nagaon and Karbi Anglong in Assam and in the Dimapur sub-Division of the state of Nagaland. According to 2001 census report of India the total number of Dimasa speakers are approximately 3, 00,000.

Phonological Variations of Bodo and Dimasa

The common vowel phonemes of Bodo and Dimasa are /i, e, a, o, u/, but Bodo has /u/ whereas Dimasa has /ə/. Both the languages have identical number of consonants and they are /p^h, b, t^h, d, k^h, g, m, n, ŋ, s, z, h, r, l, y, w/. As we have said above, the difference is that, Bodo have high back unrounded /u/ and Dimasa has mid central unrounded vowel /ə/. The high back unrounded vowel /u/ of the Bodo becomes mid central unrounded vowel /ə/ in Dimasa. The process of phonological variation of Bodo and Dimasa are given bellow:

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

12 : 1 January 2012

Pratima Brahma, M.A., Ph.D. Scholar

Phonological Variation of Lexical Items in Bodo and Dimasa - A Brief Note

1.1. Vowel Shifting

- a. The high front unrounded vowel /i/ of the Bodo becomes mid back rounded vowel /u/ in Dimasa.

Bodo	Dimasa	Gloss
/bip ^h a/	/bup ^h a/	‘father’
/bima/	/buma/	‘mother’
/bigur/	/bugur/	‘skin’
/bibu/	/bubu/	‘intestine’

- b. The mid front unrounded vowel /e/ of the Bodo becomes high front unrounded vowel /i/ in monosyllabic words and low central unrounded vowel /a/ in disyllabic words in Dimasa.

Bodo	Dimasa	Gloss
/se/	/si/	‘one’
/zek ^h ai/	/zak ^h ai/	‘a kind of bamboo net’
/deglai/	/daglai/	‘this year’

- c. The low central unrounded vowel /a/ of the Bodo becomes mid front unrounded vowel /e/ in Dimasa.

/nagar/	/negar/	‘discharge’
/nark ^h u/	/nerk ^h u/	‘press upward’
/nar/	/ner/	‘incline on one side’

- d. The low central unrounded vowel /a/ of the Bodo becomes high front unrounded vowel /i/ in Dimasa.

Bodo	Dimasa	Gloss
/za/	/zi/	‘to eat’

- e. The mid back rounded vowel /o/ of the Bodo becomes high front unrounded vowel /i/ in Dimasa e.g.

Bodo	Dimasa	Gloss
/abo/	/abi/	‘sister’
/bini/	/boni/	‘his/her’
/bisi-ni/	/bonsi-ni/	‘their’

- f. The high back rounded vowel /u/ of the Bodo becomes high front unrounded vowel /i/ in final syllable in Dimasa.

Bodo	Dimasa	Gloss
/k ^h ulum/	/k ^h ulim/	‘pay respect’
/k ^h udum/	/k ^h udim/	‘kiss’

- g. The high front unrounded vowel /i/ of the Bodo becomes mid back unrounded vowel /u/ before non-nasal sounds and /o/ before nasals in Dimasa.

/bibu/	/bubu/	‘intestine’
/bini/	/boni/	‘his/her’

- h. The high back unrounded vowel /ɯ/ of the Bodo becomes high front unrounded vowel /i/ in Dimasa.

Bodo	Dimasa	Gloss
/lɯŋ/	/liŋ/	‘to drink’
/sɯŋ/	/siŋ/	‘ask’
/raidɯŋ/	/raidɯŋ/	‘a kind of big cane’
/nɯŋ/	/niŋ/	‘you’
/gusum/	/gisim/	‘black’
/gulundi	/gilindi	‘pus’

- i. Sometimes, the high back unrounded vowel /ɯ/ of the Bodo becomes high back unrounded vowel /u/ in Dimasa.

/labɯ/	/labu/	‘bring’
/mɯk ^h ɑŋ/	/muk ^h ɑŋ/	‘face’
/lɯgɯ/	/lugu/	‘friend’
/gak ^h ɯ/	/gak ^h u/	‘rise up’
/lɯ/	/lu/	‘a kind of garland’

- j. The high back unrounded vowel /ɯ/ of the Bodo becomes low central unrounded vowel /a/ in Dimasa.

/gɯt ^h ar/	/gat ^h ar/	‘holly’
/gɯt ^h ɑŋ/	/gat ^h ɑŋ/	‘alive’
/gɯba/	/gaba/	‘vomit’
/gɯsa/	/gasa/	‘hot’

- k. The mid back rounded vowel /o/ of the Bodo becomes mid central unrounded vowel /e/ in Dimasa.

/bodop/	/bedep/	‘bend’
---------	---------	--------

- l. The front back unrounded vowel /ɯ/ of the Bodo becomes mid central unrounded vowel /ə/ when it occurs before voiced consonants in Dimasa.

Bodo	Dimasa	Gloss
/gɯbra/	/gəbra/	‘rough’
/gɯbaŋ/	/gəbaŋ/	‘many’
/k ^h ɯma/	/k ^h əma/	‘ear’
/k ^h ɯna/	/k ^h əna/	‘hear’
/k ^h anai/	/k ^h ənai/	‘hear’

/guza/	/gəza/	‘red’
--------	--------	-------

- h. The mid central rounded /o/ of Bodo becomes mid back unrounded /u/ in Dimasa and final phoneme is changed to a voiceless one.

/gorod/	/guruk/	‘a sip of water’
---------	---------	------------------

1.2. Voicing

- a. The voiceless bilabial stop /p^h/ of the Bodo becomes the bilabial voiced stop /b/ in Dimasa. The high front unrounded /i/ of Bodo in first syllable becomes mid central unrounded /ə/ when it occurs before /s/ in the Dimasa e.g.

Bodo	Dimasa	Gloss
/p ^h isai/	/bəσαι/	‘husband’
/p ^h isazla/	/bəસazla/	‘son’

- b. The voiceless alveolar stop /t^h/ of the Bodo becomes voiced alveolar stop /d/ in Dimasa.

Bodo	Dimasa	Gloss
/zat ^h i/	/zadi/	‘clan’
/zat ^h ao/	/zadao/	‘more correct’
/zat ^h ao-t ^h ao/	/zadao-dao/	‘most correct’
/zat ^h i-zat ^h i/	/zadi-zadi/	‘varieties’

- c. The voiceless velar stop /k^h/ of the Bodo becomes voiced velar stop /g/ in the Dimasa.

Bodo	Dimasa	Gloss
/k ^h ana/	/gana/	‘blind’
/k ^h aila/	/gala/	‘a kind of bitter guard’
/k ^h ani/	/gani/	‘opium’

/k ^h ania/	/gania/	‘opium smoker’
/k ^h alambla/	/galambla/	‘useful position of time’
/k ^h ant ^h i/	/gant ^h i/	‘blame’

1.3. Devoicing

- a. The alveolar voiced fricative /z/ of the Bodo becomes voiceless glottal fricative /h/ in the Dimasa.

Bodo	Dimasa	Gloss
/bizi/	/bihi/	‘wife’

- b. The alveolar voiced trill /r/ in Bodo is deleted and /k/ occurs in final position in Dimasa.

/t ^h alir/	/t ^h ailik/	‘banan’
-----------------------	------------------------	---------

1.4. Monophthongnaization

- a. The Diphthong /ɽi/ of the Bodo which occur syllable final position becomes monophthong /i/ in the Dimasa.

Bodo	Dimasa	Gloss
/dɽi/	/di/	‘water’
/adɽi/	/adi/	‘uncle’
/brɽi/	/bri/	‘four’
/t ^h ɽi/	/t ^h i/	‘blood’
/dɽik ^h or/	/dik ^k or/	‘well’
/dɽima/	/dima/	‘river’
/k ^h udɽi/	/k ^h udi/	‘spit’
/mɽip ^h rai/	//mip ^h rai/	‘a kind of vegetable’

/dwiit ^h un/	/dit ^h un/	‘wave’
/madui/	/madi/	‘aunty’
/suima/	/sima/	‘dog’

- b. The diphthong /ɯi/ of the Bodo becomes monophthong /u/ when it occurs before /k^h/ in the Dimasa.

Bodo	Dimasa	Gloss
/mɯik ^h i/	/muk ^h i/	‘eye gum’
/mɯik ^h un/	/muk ^h un/	‘mushroom’
/mɯidru/	/mudru/	‘vegetable prepared by many kinds’

- c. The diphthong /ɯu/ of the Bodo which occurs in final syllable becomes monophthong /u/ in the Dimasa.

Bodo	Dimasa	Gloss
/gɯt ^h ɯu/	/gut ^h u/	‘deep’
/mɯsɯu/	/musu/	‘cow’
/gɯzɯu/	/guzu/	‘high’
/zibɯu/	/zubu/	‘snake’
/zɯu/	/zu/	‘rice bear’
/t ^h aizɯu/	/t ^h aizu/	‘mango’

- d. The diphthong /ai/ of Bodo become monophthong /i/ in Dimasa.

/p ^h orai/	/p ^h ori/	‘read’
-----------------------	----------------------	--------

1.5. Vowel deletion

- a. The high front unrounded vowel /i/ of the Bodo becomes zero in the Dimasa e.g.

Bodo	Dimasa	Gloss
-------------	---------------	--------------

/bida/	/bda/	‘brother’
/bilai/	/blai/	‘leaf’

- b. The low central unrounded vowel /a/ and high back unrounded vowel of the Bodo deleted and becomes initial consonant cluster in the Dimasa.

Bodo	Dimasa	gloss
/salai/	/slai/	‘tongue’
/malai/	/mlai/	‘others’
/k ^h alai/	/k ^h lai/	‘do’

- c. The front unrounded back vowel /u/ in the Bodo is deleted and becomes initial two consonant cluster in Dimasa e.g

/gulaɔ/	/glao/	‘long’
/sulaɪ/	/slai/	‘change’

1.6. Vowel insertion

- d. The mid back rounded vowel /o/ is inserted and become diphthong in the Dimasa e.g.

Bodo	Dimasa	Gloss
/sase/	/saose/	‘one’
/P ^h ap ^h li/	/p ^h aop ^h li/	‘hunch’

- e. The mid back rounded /u/ is inserted in the Dimasa.

Bodo	Dimasa	Gloss
/hadri/	/haduri/	‘dust’

- f. The high front unrounded vowel /i/ is inserted and become diphthong /ai/ in Dimasa.

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

12 : 1 January 2012

Pratima Brahma, M.A., Ph.D. Scholar

Phonological Variation of Lexical Items in Bodo and Dimasa - A Brief Note

/ransro/	/rain.sro/	‘dry’
/san/	/sain/	‘sun’
/sanza/	/sainza/	‘east’
/ban/	/bain/	‘carry’ (by shoulder)
/gan/	/gain/	‘wear’
/p ^h an/	/p ^h ain/	‘sell’

1.7. Consonant insertion

- a. The voiced alveolar trill /r/ is inserted after voiced consonant and it forms a medial two consonant cluster in Dimasa.

Bodo	Dimasa	Gloss
/begenɲ/	/begrenɲ/	‘bone’
/daoganɲ/	/daogrenɲ/	‘feather’
/embu/	/embru/	‘frog’
/bai/	/brai/	‘buy’
/ganɲ/	/granɲ/	‘classifier flat long things’
/gonɲ/	/gronɲ/	‘classifier denoting small long thing’

- b. The alveolar voiceless fricative /s/ is inserted before a voiced consonant in Dimasa.

/gu/	/sgu/	‘nine’
/muɲ/	/smuɲ/	‘surname’

- c. The alveolar voiced lateral /l/ is inserted and becomes a partner in medial consonant cluster in Dimasa.

/nap ^h am/	/nap ^h lam/	‘fermented fish’
-----------------------	------------------------	------------------

1.8. Consonant deletion

- a. The alveolar voiced trill consonant phoneme /r/ of Bodo when it is preceded by a vowel is deleted in final position in Dimasa.

/st ^h ur-bat ^h ur/	sit ^h ur-bat ^h u	‘disregard’
/nat ^h ur/	nat ^h u	‘lobster’
/gup ^h ur/	/gup ^h u/	‘white’
/dor/	/do/	‘classifier denotes piece of meat, fish etc.’
/gasler/	/gasle/	‘slip’
/geder/	/gede/	‘big’
/musler/	/musle/	‘unclear/

- b. The consonant phoneme which occurs in second syllable in Bodo is deleted in Dimasa.

/nabidui/	/nadi/	‘egg of fish’
/na.p ^h isa/	/nasa/	‘small fish’

Conclusion

Bodo and Dimasa are used as the names of the language as well as of the community and belong to the Tibeto-Burman language family. From the above discussion of the phonological variation in Bodo and Dimasa, it is clear that as they belong to same language family, they have same phonemes except the high front back unrounded vowel /u/ of Bodo and mid central unrounded vowel /ə/ in Dimasa. The phonemes of the Bodo and Dimasa are varied by vowel shifting, voicing, devoicing, monophthongnaisation, vowel deletion, vowel insertion, consonant insertion, and consonant deletion. Since both the languages belong to the same family, many similarities exist as far as lexical items are concerned. A few differences are noticed and these differences can be explained by applying certain phonological rules as we have demonstrated above. It is hoped that the knowledge that we got from this paper can be applied to language learning/teaching so that a Bodo speaker who wants to learn Dimasa or vice versa can use this

knowledge for that purpose. Textbooks in both the languages may also benefit by this understanding

Colophon

I am grateful to Prof. Ajit Kumar Baishya, Professor, Department of Linguistics, Assam University, Silchar, who had gone through this paper and offered his valuable comments and suggestions.

References

ASHER, R.E.1994. *The Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics*. Oxford Pergamon Press.

BASUMATARY, BAKUL CHANDRA. 2009. *Bodo Civilisation in India*, Ganda offset
Kokrajhar.

BHATTACHARJEE, J.B. 1997. *Cachar Under British Rule in North East India*. New Delhi:
Radiant Publishers.

BHATTACHARYA, PRAMAD CHANDRA. 2nd edition, 2007. *Descriptive analysis of the Bodo
Language*, Guwahati: Guahati University Press.

BHATTACHARYA, PRAMAD CHANDRA.2003. *Aspect of North East Indian Languages*
Saraighat Laser Print, Silpukhuri, ghy-3.

BISWAS, SUKUMAR.1996. *Morpho-Phonemic Analysis of the Verbals of Assamese and
Bengali*, Saraighat Photo Types Industrial Estate Bamunimaidam, ghy-21.

BORDOLOI, B.N. 2nd edition, 1984. *The Dimasa Kacharis of Assam*, Tribal Research Institute,
Assam.

CHESTERJI, SUNITI KUMAR. 1998 Reprinted. *Kirata Jana Kriti*, Calcutta: Asiatic Society.

CLARK. J. and YALLOP, C. 2nd edition, 1995. *An aintroduction to Phonetics and Phonlogy*,

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

12 : 1 January 2012

Pratima Brahma, M.A., Ph.D. Scholar

Phonological Variation of Lexical Items in Bodo and Dimasa - A Brief Note

England: Blackwell.

CRYSTAL, DAVID. 1980. *A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics*. Cambridge: Basil Blackwell.

GAIT, E. 1926. *A history of Assam*. Reprinted 1992, Guwahati: lawyer's Book Stall.

GRIERSON, G. A. 1903. Linguistic Survey of India. Vol III, Pt, II. Rep. 1967-68, New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas.

LYONS, JOHN. 2009. *Language and Linguistics*. (reprinted), Cambridge University press.

NAGARAJA, K.S. 1997. 'Realization of Case in Khasi'. In: *Languages of the North-East*, Ed. By P.N. Dutta Baruah. 137-49. Mysore: Central Institute of Indian Languages.

NATH DAS, GIRINDRA. 2006. *Tribel tradition and Development in the hill area of Assam*. Jip print Associates, Guahati-3, Chandmari.

ROBINS, R.H. 4th ed. 1989. General Linguistics, 'An Introductory Survey'. Longman, London and Newyork.

SINGHA, DR. DHIREN. 2007. *An introduction to Dimasa phonology*. DVS Publishers, H.B road, Pan Bazar, Gauhati-1.

=====
Pratima Brahma, M.A., Ph. D. Scholar
Department of Linguistics
Assam University
Silchar 788011
Assam
India
pratimabrahma@yahoo.in

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

12 : 1 January 2012

Pratima Brahma, M.A., Ph.D. Scholar

Phonological Variation of Lexical Items in Bodo and Dimasa - A Brief Note