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Looking at Assamese Journalistic Language vis-à-vis the Linguistic Style - A Bird's Eye-view

Dinee Samad, M.A.

Introduction

The linguistic evolution requires the people's urge to adapt language. The newspaper, representing a sub-variety of language, occupies a special place in our day-to-day information about the happenings around us. While bringing about a comparison of different genres it is found that the journalistic language has its own style and manner of presenting the news reports, informal articles, etc., in an organized way. Not only does it throw light upon the happenings of the surroundings as well as of the world, but also bears evidence to a variety of structure and style of language it is written in. Here, we would focus upon the developmental stages vis-à-vis the linguistic changes of Assamese newspapers since their inception.

Assamese Journalism

Assamese journalism started its onward march in the first half of the 20th century. It has now achieved a stage where it is interesting to study how language in its written form (which is basically meant to inform) imparts knowledge and entertains people on a day-to-day basis, has developed a style of its own. In fact, newspapers evolving in different periods of history also serve as authentic documents of the various stages of language development, in terms of style, word-usage, etc. The journey from *Orunodoi* (**Sunrise**) till today would reveal how Assamese journalism has enriched itself with a good number of newspapers. It is also equally important, at

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the same time, to investigate the level of change and its development in relation to other national newspapers.

Significance of *Orunodoi*



<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orunodoi>

The kick-start of Assamese journalism was done with the initiative of British missionaries, in the form of newsletter-cum-magazine *Orunodoi*. In the hands of non-native speakers, the written Assamese language took a form which is in stark contrast to the standard written form today, so far as newspaper language is concerned. In fact, the language of this proto-type Assamese newspaper, rather, randomly selected and incorporated the language variety of the area that the missionaries got access to. It is however, said that *Orunodoi* language was closer to the old Assamese poetry, prose, history and Katha Charit. It's most significant contribution was the effort to establish Assamese language as an independent language and not an offshoot of Bengali, as was believed then. Therefore, *Orunodoi* today tends to be an important record of how Assamese language and literature gradually developed and has achieved today's so-called 'standard' written form. Some examples are cited below-

i)*inglond dexor karlail nogoror osorot eta manuhe 6 disemboror rati motoliya hoi relrodor oporot xui tuponite aasil,tate ekhan kol roth aahi rothor ghilai tar mur eke beli singi pelale....*

(Vol I, Sibsagor, Asam, March 1846, No.3)

(.....near Carlyle town in England one person on December 6th night laid asleep in drunken state, there a coal train came and its wheel completely stripped off his head.)

In this example the use of terms like - *inglond* (England) *dex* , *rothor ghila* (cart-wheel), *eke beli* (completely), etc., are no longer used in Assamese newspapers, nor are they used in any other kind of written expression and therefore can be called dead terms. Moreover, *dex* (as in

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inglond dex) succeeds the name of the country, which is today omitted, rendering it as un-requisite.

The headline in Orunodoi appeared in both Assamese and in English with the latter in a smaller font .An example is given below.

(ii)

নায়াগৰা আদি নদি পতন

Account of celebrated Cataracts

prithibir oporot ji ukho porbot ase prai ataibilak oti puroni tan xilor hoi. Kono thait matir tole puroni xil thake kono matir xil noya; ei rupe bhumi bidh bidh ase.

(March 1851, Vol VI, No 3)

(The referred hill that is above the earth is mostly of very old rock. In some places, under the ground there exists old rock while some ground has new rock; in this form there are different types of soil.)

The spellings do not equate with that of standard spelling system of today as is shown below.

<u>Orunodoi spelling</u>	<u>Modified spelling</u>	<u>Meaning</u>
সিংগ (singi)	চিঙি	having torn
এখন (ekhan)	এখন	numeral classifier for one
প্ৰিথিবি (prithibi)	পৃথিবি	earth
প্ৰাই (prai)	প্ৰায়	almost
সিল (xil)	শিল	rock

Following the footsteps of the first Assamese newspaper there were other newspapers that evolved and to name some were - *AsamBilasini*(1871-83), *AsamNews*(1882-85), *AxamBondhu*(1885-86), *Axam*(1894-1901), *TheAssamBanti* (1900-44), *Oxomiya*(1918-58), *Batori*(1930-35), *Tarun Asom* (1939-42), *Bihlongoni* (1947-80), *Janambhumi* (1947), *Natun Asamiya* (1949-82), *Dainik Asom* (1965-), *Ajir Asom* (1987-), *Asomiya Pratidin* (1995-), *Dainik Agradoot* (1995-), *Amar Asom* (1997-), etc.

Eventual Change in the Style and Structure

There was an eventual change in the style and structure as well as in the use of vocabulary. Different Assamese newspapers from time have tried to be innovative by adding a native flavour to the language. The features of different newspapers are given below-

Newspapers & Features:

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19th c.

Orunodoi: Language based on 'spoken form' and closer to old prose and poetry, unmodified spelling system, usage of non-standard variety of the vocabulary, usage of less Assamese letters and indifference of long and short vowels. In addition, there was usage of block picture and English like syntax, style and language.

Assam Bilasini: Influence of Sanskrit, use of Bengali letter instead of modern Assamese, detailed information with the use of formal language and short sentences. Use of unmodified spellings, similes and information appeared in small clauses.

The block of this newspaper comprised two Sanskrit *slokas* - one on inner side and another on the outer side.

Asam News: Modification of spelling system put forward by missionaries especially the prosaic language and getting rid of the inappropriate use of idioms. Special emphasis was given on the syntax vis-à-vis the native flavour and thereby arriving at a standard form.

Axam Bandhu: Carelessness regarding spellings and the grammatical pattern, retaining Bengali, satirical writings on female education and their liberty.

Axam: Each issue comprised 8 pages only. Use of short sentences with compact meanings. The language opened a way to a modern style of journalistic prose.

The Assam Banti: A new style was introduced here with the naming of the special columns with typical Assamese terms. Letters and articles were written both in Assamese and English.

Oxomiya: Special emphasis was given on using indigenous or Assamicised terms.

20th c.

Tarun Asom: It had a logo with a symbolic representation of Assam. The masthead was written in Roman. Moreover, a nationalist poem, divided into two, appeared on its either side. For the first time a puzzle game (like crossword puzzle) was introduced. Emphasis on usage of domestic terms, idioms and more interestingly the English loan words were translated into indigenous terms.

Bihlongoni: Its masthead, which was a magical chant, reflected its objectives. i.e voicing against the social evils, corruptions etc. Its editorial declared its objectives.

Janambhumi: Writings on and by women, children's column found a place.

21st c.

Asomiya Khabar: In this newspaper, while reporting a story by a correspondent, the dateline is preceded by the term *aamar khabar* (*our news*). It uses standard form of written Assamese.

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Janasadharan : It has a punch line like “ *itibasok sintare rusixomponno pathokor babe*”(with positive thoughts for interested readers). In headlines generally the object is placed at the end of the sentence and the verb precedes it, meant for emphasis of the happening or information conveyed.

AdinorSambad: Following the 5W&H(**who?,where?,what?,when?,why? &how?**) theory the opening sentence of a report begins with generally three categories like where-what-when, etc.

Niyomiya Barta: A standard written Assamese is used here. The headline of the most important story appears with a bigger font and is accompanied by two or more subheadings.

Experiments and Impact:

From the available old Assamese newspapers that came up at different periods, it can be safely stated that the educated section experimented with the style and structure of newspaper language. In other words, the process of simplification of Assamese prose, post-*Orunodoi*, in the hands of eminent writers like Anandaram Dhekial Phukan, Hemchandra Barua, Gunabhiram Barua, Laxminath Bezbaruah, and others not only innovated the old classical form of written speech but also further opened up new possibilities in this genre. Therefore, newspapers became a strong medium of reflecting this new change.

The pioneers, who took up the task of giving a form of written presentation of facts or reports, also tried to be innovative and therefore the style differed from newspaper to newspaper. In fact, the pursuit of the missionaries in establishing Assamese as a separate language through *Orunodoi*, further opened up new paths of incorporating indigenous elements in the written language.

Prosaic Style

In newspapers like **Asam News** and **Asam Banti**, some stories attracted the attention of the British. While talking about the style the most significant is the prosaic language which varies with other writings of the same genre. This difference is due to certain norms, i.e., compactness, informative, instructing and, in addition, of entertaining the reader that a newspaper follows. The reader grasps the story the way the reporter, correspondent or a casual writer presents, coloured by subjectivity and choice of words pertaining to the story.

The Journalese

Though the straightjacket newspaper norms is supposed to avoid all sorts of ornamental or extra words, yet journalists are found to be attracted towards figures of speech, clichés or jargons - a style commonly known as journalese. Given below are some examples commonly found in Assamese newspapers.

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Newspaper terms taken from four Assamese dailies:

Clichés

xeuj xongket (green signal), *bhoyawoh* (dreaded), *preron* (send), *rokhyonabekhyon* (safeguard), *ontorgoto*(under), *bhosmibhuto* (burnt into ashes), *totha* (like that), *gobhir xongkot* (deep trouble), *rajpoth kopa* (shake main road), *jolonto udahoron* (burning example), *xukor sã* (shadow of condolence), *bisphurok tothyo* (explosive data), *pholot* (as a result), *logote* (along with), *xodori* (make public), *xehotiya* (recently), *nissidro nirapotta bestoni* (nonporous security barricade), *xondorbho* (about), *jonoxomudro* (sea of people).

Simile

Alauddinor saki xoddrix (like Alauddin's lamp), *Kathphular dore* (like mushroom).

Idiom

jiyatu bhoga (suffer), *uttom modhyom* (best assault, beat up), *ronga phitar merpes* (wrapping with red ribbon; red tapism), *mure kopale hat diya* (put hand on forehead; regret), *trahi modhuxudhon xuwora* (remember Krishna for help), *axat sesapani pora* (spill cold water onto one's wish; disappointed), *rohosyor ãar kapor* (cover cloth of mystery), *mukh thekesa khowa* (get mouth thrashed; greatly disappointed).

Common Features

Based upon different topics or categories of news reporting there is some commonality among Assamese newspapers so far as usage of some terms is concerned. Some are categorically shown below.

Sports

<i>Duronto prodorxon</i>	Indomitable performance
<i>Kheluwoidoi</i>	Players duo
<i>Taroka opener</i>	Star opener
<i>Ranor ogrogoti</i>	Progress of run
<i>Point</i>	Point
<i>Oporajit</i>	Not out

Obituary

<i>Xex nissax tyag</i>	Leave last breath
<i>Xukor sã</i>	Shadow of condolence

Health

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Akranto Afflicted
Arugyor pothot In the path of recovery

Legislation

Dumukhiya niti Two-mouthed policy
Amola Subject
Bolowot Implement
Greptari porwana Arrest warrant
Zamin Bail
Ponjiyon Registration
Atok Arrest/capture

Religious words

Photuwa zari An Islamic verdict
Puspanjoli orpon Floral libation
Xotkar Cremate
Pourohityo Be the priest/ preside

Learned words

Prohoxon A farce
Nirongkux Unperturbed
Ohupuruxarttho Try hard
Xouharddopurno With intimacy
Smortobyo Memorable
Mophsoliya Outskirts
Protyawortton return

Foreign words

Dabidar Claimant
Sorzomin On the spot
Hazir present

Grammatical Style

As far as grammatical style is concerned, like any language newspaper, Assamese newspapers also are found to apply *journalese* that may include clichés, jargon, or figures of speech. The difference of style, especially in the same news report, in different newspapers could be traced from the choice of words as in the following examples.

Headline

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(i) *BCCI re sukta batil* (Amar Asom)
(Contract with BCCI cancels)

(ii) *BCCI r xoite thoka dirghodiniya sponsor batil.* (Asomiya Pratidin)
(Longterm sponsor with BCCI cancels)

While comparing both the headlines it is found that the first headline uses more words compared to that of the second. Amar Asom uses the Assamese term for ‘sponsor’ but Asomiya Pratidin retains the English term for the same. The difference of language in terms of reporting common news in these two newspapers could be marked in the following two examples.

i) *biswa ti tiloi Tridib (Tridib to world TT)*

Guwahati, 17 March: *Prakton antorastrिया kheluwoi totha bharatiya tebul tennis federationor zutiya xompadok aru axom tebul tennis xonthar xompadok Tridib Duwerak biswa tebul tennis protijugitar babe bharotor purux aru mohila dolor manajer hisape nirbasito kora hoise.....*(Asomiya Pratidin, 18th March 2012)

(Former international player and Joint Secretary of Indian Table Tennis Federation and Secretary of Assam Table Tennis Federation, Tridib Duwera has been selected as manager of India’s men and women Table Tennis teams for World Table Tennis Competition.....).

ii) *xosthobaroloi biswa table tennisot bharotiyo dolor manager Tridib Duwerah (Tridib Duwerah, manager of Indian team of world table tennis for the sixth time).*

Staff reporter, 17 March: *Antorrajatik khyatixomponno table tennis kheluwoi Tridib Duwerah Germanit hobologiya bishwa table tennis championshipor bharatiya dolor manajer hisape nijukto hoise.....* (Amar Asom, 18th March 2012)

(Internationally acclaimed table tennis player Tridib Duwerah has been appointed as manager of the Indian team of World Table Tennis Championship to be held in Germany.....)

The headline in Asomiya Pratidin (AP) is comparatively shorter to that of Amar Asom (AA). AP uses acronym of Table Tennis and also doesn’t give full name of the person (Tridib Duwerah) as is given in (ii). Amar Asom has a longer, detailed headline. In the story AP uses the term protijugita (competition) whereas AA uses the English term ‘championship’.

The difference of presentation in these two newspapers could be seen in the use of the expression ‘.....manajer hisape nirbasito kora hoise’ (selected as manager) in AP and ‘*manajer hisape nijukto hoise*’ (appointed as manager) in AA . Again the word ‘*protijugita*’ in (i) is replaced by the word ‘championship’ in (ii).

To Conclude

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Therefore, the emergence of the newspaper language, owing to the differences of language and style as shown above, has become a source of investigation today. Further, with the addition of Assamese newspapers from time to time and the sense of competition of the regional (Assamese) newspapers with those of the national, a new genre has developed, thus building a scope for analyzing the features of language development/change vis-à-vis imparting information to the masses .

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