

LANGUAGE IN INDIA

Strength for Today and Bright Hope for Tomorrow

Volume 12 : 2 February 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.

Sylheti Bengali Influence on the Syntax of Hawar Dialect of Dimasa

Bapan Barman, Ph.D. Research Scholar

ABSTRACT

Language contact refers to a situation of geographical continuity or close social proximity (and thus of mutual influence) between languages or dialects (Crystal, 1980). One of the outcomes of language contact is a change in the structural inventory of at least one of the languages involved, and sometimes of both. Often it is viewed as a kind of structural import or form of one language system into another language (Matras, 2009). Due to prolong contact with the Bengali speaking people in Barak Valley, the Dimasas has incorporated some linguistic features from dominant language ‘Bengali’. Though the Sylheti Bengali influence can be seen at every level including at the lexical level, the present paper describes the incorporation of the grammatical elements of Sylheti Bengali in the syntax of the Hawar dialect of Dimasa.

INTRODUCTION

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

12 : 2 February 2012

Bapan Barman, Ph.D. Research Scholar

Sylheti Bengali Influence on the Syntax of Hawar Dialect of Dimasa

Dimasa is the name of the language and also the name of the community. Literally, the meaning of the word 'Dimasa' is 'the children of the big river' (Bordoloi 1984). According to Sir Edward Gait (1926), Dimasas were known as 'Timisa' to the Ahoms which is a corrupted form of Dimasa.

Dimasa, belonging to Tibeto-Burman language family is spoken in different districts of Assam namely, Nagaon, North Cachar Hills, Karbi Anglong, in Barak Valley region of Cachar and Hailakandi district. Besides Assam, Dimasa is also spoken in Dimapur sub-division of Nagaland. The estimated population of Dimasa according to the census report of India 2001 is 1,10,976.

Dimasa tribe, which belongs to Indo-Mongoloid Kachari group, is found in North East region of India. G. A. Grierson (1903) in his Linguistic Survey of India, Vol. II, Pt. II classifies Dimasa under the Bodo (Boro) of the Bodo-Naga division of the Assam-Burmese section of the Tibeto-Burman group of the Sino-Tibetan or Tibeto-Chinese speech family. In the classification given by Paul Benedict (1972), Dimasa is included under Bodo-Garo sub-group of Tibeto-Burman Branch of Sino-Tibetan family.

The Dimasa Kacharis are one of the major tribal communities of Assam. Bordoloi (1984) said that the Dimasas ruled Dimapur which was a capital city of Dimasa Kachari for about 450 years. After the invasion by Ahom at Dimapur in the year 1536, the Dimasas left Dimapur and established a new capital at Maibong which was surrounded by the Naga and Kuki tribes in North Cachar Hills district (at present Dima Hasao district). However, the Dimasas could not stay there for long. About 1750 A.D., the Dimasas shifted their capital from Maibong to Khaspur in the plains Cachar of Barak Valley region.

The Barak Valley located in South Assam has three districts under its jurisdiction, viz., Cachar, Karimganj and Hailakandi. The majority people in Barak Valley speak Sylheti, a dialect of Bengali. It is the main language used for communication in the three districts of Barak Valley.

When Dimasa Kachari King had his capital at Maibang, the process of Hinduisation began among the royal families. However, the formal conversion took place in the year 1790 at

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

12 : 2 February 2012

Bapan Barman, Ph.D. Research Scholar

Sylheti Bengali Influence on the Syntax of Hawar Dialect of Dimasa

Khaspur of Cachar districts of the Barak Valley region. Along with the conversion of the Kachari King by a Bengalee Brahman, a large number of his subjects also adopted Hinduism.

The Dimasas of the Barak Valley who are identified as Barman are highly influenced by the Hindu Bengali culture. Moreover, the Barmans or Dimasas of Barak Valley are maintaining both Dimasa tradition as well as Hindu rituals. Thus, marriage and funeral rituals are performed by Bengali Brahmins.

The historical documents show that the Dimasas came into close contact with different groups of people. Danda (1978) mentioned the continuous contact of Dimasas with the neighbouring tribal and non-tribal people like Zemi Nagas, Bengalees, and Assamese in hills area. She further said that the Dimasas can speak broken Assamese, Bengali and Hindi. Bordoloi (1984) also said about the use of Assamese scripts by the Dimasa Kachari kings even after shifting of their capital from Maibong to Khaspur and their gradual giving up of the scripts and accepting the Bengali scripts due to contact with the Bengali speaking people of Cachar. All these historical facts clearly indicate the contact of Dimasas had with different communities at different point of time.

The present paper is to describe the Indo-Aryan grammatical elements of Sylheti Bengali incorporated in the Tibeto-Burman syntax of the Hawar dialect of Dimasa.

1. LANGUAGE CONTACT

The Dimasas of Cachar district situated in Barak Valley speak fluent Sylheti, a regional dialect of Bengali. Due to prolong contact with the Bengali speaking people in Barak Valley, the Dimasas has incorporated some linguistic features from dominant language ‘Bengali’ which is an official language, a medium of instruction in schools and a mode of communication in the Barak Valley region.

Language contact refers to a situation of geographical continuity or close social proximity (and thus of mutual influence) between languages or dialects (Crystal, 1980). The language contact is said to be concerned with the outcomes for speakers and their languages when new languages are introduced into a speech community. Language contact sometimes occurs in the

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

12 : 2 February 2012

Bapan Barman, Ph.D. Research Scholar

Sylheti Bengali Influence on the Syntax of Hawar Dialect of Dimasa

increased social interaction between people from neighbouring territories who have traditionally spoken different languages (Mesthrie, Swann, Deumert and Leap, 2000).

One of the outcomes of language contact is a change in the structural inventory of at least one of the languages involved, and sometimes of both. Often it is viewed as a kind of structural import or form of one language system into another language (Matras, 2009). This process is known as ‘borrowing’ (Haugen, 1950). It implies the incorporation of items like words, grammatical elements or sounds from one language into another (Mesthrie, Swann, Deumert and Leap, 2000).

2. SYNTACTIC EXPANSION

2.1. Coordinative Clause:

The function of coordination is to join words, phrases, clauses and sentences. Coordinative clause in Barak Valley dialect of Dimasa is expressed by using conjunctive particles. Due to a close contact with the Bengali speaking people, the Hawar dialect of Dimasa is gradually substituting the original conjunctive/disjunctive particles by Bengali /ar/ ‘and’, /kinṭu/ ‘but’, /ba/ ‘or’. For example:-

(i) /odehe/ ‘and’

/aŋ odehe bo t^haŋ –ma/

I and he go –Fut.

‘I and he will go’.

/aŋ no –ha t^haŋ –k^ha odehe mək^ham zi –k^ha/

I home –Loc. go –Past and rice eat –Past

‘I went home and ate rice’.

/ram sam odehe mona t^haŋ –k^ha/

ram sam and mona go –Past

‘Ram, Sam and Mona went’.

However, the Indo-Aryan Bengali word /ar/ is incorporated in Hawar dialect of Dimasa instead of /odehe/ and almost all the Hawar dialect speakers are using /ar/. For example:-

/binoi laisi ruŋ –bi ar subuŋ bo ham –bi/

binoi book educate –Pred. and person also good –Pred.

‘Binoi is educated and also (a) good person’.

(ii) /t^hik^habo/ ‘but’

/alu gusum t^hik^habo məzaŋbi/

cat black but beautiful

‘The cat is black but beautiful’.

The inclusion of Indo-Aryan word /kinṭu/ meaning ‘but’ is found in the Hawar dialect. For example:-

/aŋ bo –k^he zuru –ba kinṭu bo p^hai –ya –k^ha/

I he –Acc. call –Past but he come –Neg. –Past

‘I called him but he did not come’.

(iii) /niyak^hade/ ‘or’

It functions as disjunctive construction which is formed by placing /niyak^hade/ in between two propositions expressing the idea that only one of the possibilities can be realized. For example,

/aŋ niyak^hade bo p^hai –naŋ/

I or he come –Fut.

‘I or he will (certainly) come’.

/bo niyak^hade nuŋ/

he or you

‘He or you’.

But /ba/, a borrowed Indo-Aryan word is used by the Barak Valley dialect of Dimasa. For example:-

/aŋ ba bo/

I or he

‘I or he’.

/ram ba sam sop^hai –naŋ/

ram or sam arrive –Fut.

‘Ram or Sam will (certainly) come’.

2.2. Conditional Clause

Conditional clause in Barak Valley dialect of Dimasa is introduced by using double conditional particle –one is /zodi/ a borrowed Indo-Aryan word which occurs in the initial position of the subordinate clause and the other forms like ‘-k^hade’, ‘-k^hahi’, ‘-k^haha’ are suffixed to the verb root of the subordinate clause implying same meaning ‘if’. The conditional particle like ‘-t^hik^hade’, ‘-t^hik^haha’, ‘-t^hik^hahi’ are also suffixed to the verb root of the subordinate clause when aspect and tense marker are used and it comes after the aspect, tense marker. For example:-

/zodi nuŋ t^haŋ –k^hade ram p^hai –naŋ/

/zodi nuŋ t^haŋ –k^hahi ram p^hai –naŋ/

/zodi nuŋ t^haŋ –k^haha ram p^hai –naŋ/

if (Cond.) you go –if(Cond.) ram come –Fut.

‘If you go, Ram will (certainly) come’.

/zodi hadi ha –du –t^hik^hade aŋ t^haŋ –naŋ –niya/

/zodi hadi ha –du –t^hik^haha aŋ t^haŋ –naŋ –niya/

/zodi hadi ha –du –t^hik^hahi aŋ t^haŋ –naŋ –niya/

if(Cond.) rain fall–Pre. if(Cond.) I go –Fut. –Neg.

‘If it rains, I will (certainly) not go’.

/zodi k^husi daŋ –blai –k^ha –t^hik^hade aŋ t^haŋ –naŋ/

if(Cond.) work do –Perf.–Past –if(Cond.) I go –Fut.

‘If the work has done/had done, I will (certainly) go’.

/zodi nuŋ t^haŋ –sai –du –t^hik^hade aŋ p^hai –naŋ/

if(Cond.) you go –Prog.–Pre.–if(Cond.) I come –Fut.

‘If you are going, I will (certainly) come’.

2.3. Complement Clause

The complement clause in Hawar dialect of Dimasa is not introduced by any native complementizer as there is no overt complementizer in standard Dimasa but the complement clause is introduced by complementizer ‘ze’ meaning ‘that’ which is borrowed by Hawar dialect of Dimasa from Indo-Aryan language Bengali. The complement clause always follows the main clause in Hawar dialect. For example:-

/aŋ mit^hi –du ze bo subuŋ hamya/

I know –Pre. Comp. he man bad

‘I know that he is bad person’.

/ram aŋ –k^he t^hi –k^ha ze bo p^hai –k^ha/

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

12 : 2 February 2012

Bapan Barman, Ph.D. Research Scholar

Sylheti Bengali Influence on the Syntax of Hawar Dialect of Dimasa

ram I –Acc. say –Past Comp. he come –Past

‘Ram said to me that he came’.

/ebo grao gibi-nuŋ ze bo t^{hi} –k^{ha}/

this word true-Emph. Cond. he die –Past

‘This is true that he died’.

2.4. Relative Clause

In Hawar dialect of Dimasa, the relative clause is expressed by the relative pronoun ‘ze’ which is a borrowed Indo-Aryan word. In standard Dimasa, the relative clause is introduced by the participle ‘-yaba’ and the relative clause can either precedes or follow the head noun. But in Hawar dialect, the relative pronoun ‘ze’ always precedes the head noun. For example:

Standard Dimasa:- /miyaha p^hai –yaba məsainzu boni bubu/
yesterday come –Partl. girl his sister

Standard Dimasa:- /miyaha məsainzu p^hai –yaba boni bubu/
yesterday girl come –Partl. his sister

Hawar dialect:- /miyaha ze məsainzu p^hai –ba bo boni bubu/
yesterday RP. girl come –Past she his sister

‘The girl who came yesterday is his sister’.

3. CONCLUSION

From the above discussion, it can be said that the Hawar dialect of Dimasa has undergone some contact-induced changes. Though Hawar dialect of Dimasa retained much of its grammatical elements but at the same time has gained many syntactic features from the dominant language Bengali. As Abbi (1992) said this contact-induced changes have created the process of linguistic expansion which is known as language conflation – one of the phenomenon of Language in India www.languageinindia.com

12 : 2 February 2012

Bapan Barman, Ph.D. Research Scholar

Sylheti Bengali Influence on the Syntax of Hawar Dialect of Dimasa

language change every language has the potential to pass through and Hawar dialect of Dimasa is no exception as far as this particular is concerned.

COLOPHON

I express my deep sense of gratitude to Professor Ajit Kumar Baishya, Department of Linguistics, Assam University, Silchar who had gone through this paper thoroughly and made useful suggestions which helped me improve the presentation of this paper.

References

Abbi, Anvita 1992. *'Language death and conflation: A paradoxical oscillation'* in O. N. Koul

(ed) *Sociolinguistics: South Asian Perspectives*, New Delhi: Creative Books

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

Benedict, Paul K. 1972. *Sino-Tibetan: A Conspectus*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bordoloi, B.N. 2nd ed. 1984. *The Dimasa Kacharis of Assam*. Guwahati: Tribal Research Institute, Assam.

Crystal, David. 1980. *A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics*. Cambridge: Basil Blackwell.

Danda, Dipali G.1978. *Among the Dimasa of Assam: An Ethnographic Study*. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd.

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:

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

12 : 2 February 2012

Bapan Barman, Ph.D. Research Scholar

Sylheti Bengali Influence on the Syntax of Hawar Dialect of Dimasa

Motilal Banarsidas.

Matras, Yaron 2009. *Language Contact*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Mesthrie, Rajend, J. Swann, A. Deumert and W. L. Leap 2000. *Introducing Sociolinguistics*.

Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

=====

Bapan Barman, Ph.D. Research Scholar
Department of Linguistics
Assam University
Silchar 788011
Assam, India
bapan.barman@yahoo.co.in

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

12 : 2 February 2012

Bapan Barman, Ph.D. Research Scholar

Sylheti Bengali Influence on the Syntax of Hawar Dialect of Dimasa