Tense System of the Mech (Bodo) Language of North Bengal

Rujab Muchahary, M.A.

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Abstract

The Bodos of North Bengal are known as Mech under the record of Government of West Bengal. Racially they belong to Mongoloid stock and linguistically to the Tibeto- Burman branch of Sino-Tibetan language family. Their concentration is found throughout the districts of Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling, some parts of Cooach Behar of West Bengal. They have been maintaining their culture and language from the time immemorial.

Tense is a type of grammatical category which indicates situation of time i.e. past, present and future. It is closely related to action of verb. Morphologically, this language has three distinct tenses, viz., past, present and future. They use tense markers {-bai, -a, -mɯn} for past, {-ɯ, -dɔŋ} for present and {-nɯchʰɯi, -nai} for future tense. The tense markers are normally

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suffixes. The main objective of this paper is to find out the different types of tense, as well as case markers used by the Mech people of North Bengal.

Key words: Mech (Bodo) language, Tense, Past tense, Present tense, Future tense, tense markers

1.0. Introduction

The Bodos are known with different names in different places. Sir Edward Gait describes, the Bodos are identical with the people called Mech in Goalpara and North Bengal. In the Brahmaputra valley of Assam the Kacharis call themselves Bodo fisa (sons of the Bodo). In the north Kachar Hills they call themselves Dimasa *(History of Assam, 2008).* According to Charu Chandra Sanyal, the Bodos of Jalpaiguri and Terai call themselves as Mech because they settled on the banks of the river *'Mechi' (The Meches and the Totos, 1973.).* The Government of West Bengal recognizes the Bodos of North Bengal as Mech. Racially they belong to Mongoloid origin and linguistically to the Tibeto-Burman sub-family within the Sino-Tibetan language family.

Kiryu, noticed Mech language as a western Bodo dialect *(An Outline of Meche Language- grammar, text, glossary, project report, 2005-2007).* They are concentrated throughout the districts of Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling, some parts of Cooach Behar of West Bengal. They are rich in culture and verbal language.

2.0. Objective of the Study

The main objective of this study is to find out different types of tense and tense markers used by the Mech people.

3.0. Methodology

Like other social science research, in this study I used primary and secondary data collection method. For primary data collection I visited the location and applied interview and observation method. As secondary source I have collected different books and articles written on Mech language.

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4.0. Tense

Tense is a category used in the grammatical description of verbs. *(as stated in David Crystal's, A Dictionary of Language and Phonetics, 2008).* It is associated with the situation of time and indicates when the situation has taken place. The action of verb, which is referred to in a sentence is closely related to tense. Usually, tense markers are suffixes which are added to verbs.

4.1. Three Distinct Tenses

Morphologically, Mech have three distinct tenses on verb. These are:

i.   Past Tense

ii. Present Tense and

iii. Future Tense

4.1.1. Past Tense

The main function of the past tense is to describe an action or situation in past time. The past tense markers are {-bai, -a, -mɯn}.

For example:

i.   /aŋ taŋ-bai /

I   go-PAST

I have gone.

ii. /aŋ hatay-aɔ taŋ-a/

I   market-NOM go-PAST

I went to market.

iii. Sona-a dudu lɯŋɯ-mɯn/

Sona-NOM   milk drink-PAST

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Sona used to drink Milk.

4.1.2. Present Tense

The present tense indicates an action or situation in the present moment. It is used to refer a universal or general truth. The present tense markers are {-ɯ} and {-dɯŋ}.

For examples:

      i.   /aŋ za-ɯ/

          I   eat- PRES

          I eat.

      ii.   /aŋ ball gele- dɯŋ.

          I   ball play- PRES

          I am playing.

4.1.3. Future Tense

The future tense describes an action or event not happened yet, but expected to happen in the future time. The future tense usually means the future relative to the moment of speaking. The future markers are {-nɯcʰɯi} and {-nai}.

For examples:

      i.   /aŋ nɔ-aɔ taŋ-nɯcʰɯi/

          I   home-LOC go-FUT

          I am going home.

      ii.   /Bibari-ya ɯŋkʰam sɔŋ-nai/

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Bibari -NOM rice cook-FUT

Bibari will cook rice.

5.0. Conclusion

From the above discussion it is clear that the Mech language which belongs to the Tibeto-Burman group of language has three distinct tenses viz. past, present and future depending on situation or event of time and action of verb. Tense markers functioned as affixes. Tense markers {-bai, -a, mɯɯn} is used for past, {-ɯ, -dɯɯŋ} for present and {-nɯɯcʰɯi, -nai} for future tense.

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