

SCRIPTS USED IN MISSIONARY PERIOD OF BODO LITERATURE: DISCUSSION FROM LINGUISTIC POINT OF VIEW

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ABSTRACT

Bodo is one of the most famous languages and major tribes of North-Eastern region of India. Linguistically the Bodo language belongs to the great Sino-Tibetan language family. In this paper a microscopic discussion has been done based on scripts as used by the Christian Missionaries in writing the Bodo language during the missionary period in the history of Bodo literature. To discuss the topic some of the peculiar scripts have been taken into account in this paper.

KEYWORDS: Act of Writing, Roman Script, Diacritics Marks

INTRODUCTION

Script is necessary in writing the oral corpus or verbal mode of speech in conversion of feelings and thoughts into written expression. Such kind of orthographical requirements are necessary for writing languages and can be documented any kinds of literary and linguistic text. As cited in the 'Encyclopaedic Dictionary of Linguistics' Script is "*the act of representing, or the representation, of thoughts, ideas and speech by conventional material signs*"¹. Without a script language cannot be written down or preserved in a methodical process. Script is a part of creativity of human beings. It marks the two fold of human behavioral capacity, i.e. competence and performance of human being.

It is to be noted that Bodo language does not have historic evidence of the script that used since time immemorial. But the renowned personalities of Assam Kalaguru Bishnu Prasad Rabha once opined that "in ancient times there was a kind of Deodhai scripts *among the Kacharis (Boros and Dimasas)*"². Regarding Bodo script Madhu Ram Baro has mentioned, "*it is said that the Boro kings had a kind of Deodhai scripts, akin to Brahmi, to inscribe on the stone, pillars, monuments, royal gate, stone slates and copper plates etc. The specimens of this kind of scripts may be seen till now in indistinct state on those articles spread in the form of wreckage in the jungle areas of Khaspur, Maibang and Dimapur etc*"³.

Though some of the personalities have such kind of opinions, in real context it is a matter of conjecture as extant among the scholars of orthographical study from historical perspectives. When and how the Deodhai script was vanished from the historic landscape nobody can rightly define; there are no records as well as sculpture where it was written down. Of course some of the scholars believed that with the fall of empire of the Bodo dynasty they lost the Deodhai script forever. As available of references it may be assume that the above discussion is the history of Bodo script that used before the Missionary period.

¹ Tim, R: 2003, Encyclopaedic Dictionary of Linguistics, p.577

² Bhattacharya, Pramod Chandra: 1977, A Descriptive Analysis of the Boro Language, p. 14

³ Baro, M. R: 1990, The History of the Boro Literature, p.2

OBJECTIVES

The study aims to describe and analyze about Historical perspectives of scripts used in Bodo Language and literature. It is mainly focused on the analysis about scripts used in missionary period i.e. Roman script.

METHODOLOGY

The proposed topic has been analyzed from the diachronic perspective. The paper is mainly based on the secondary data, which is collected from the available written materials in the form of book and Magazine. To make convenient the structural analysis of phonemes has been done with linguistic approach.

SCRIPT USED IN MISSIONARY PERIOD

Missionary period of Bodo literature was started just before the end of the 19th century. According to Madhu Ram Baro "*The Missionaries discovered the Boro writing system and gave a form of writing this language in modified and simplified Roman scripts.*"⁴ After the Treaty of Yandabo agreement on 24 February 1826, this treaty marked the beginning of British rule in Assam. It was a peace treaty between East India Company and His Majesty the King of Ava that ended the First Anglo-Burmese War. The missionaries were entered in Assam through the way of Srirampur or Srirampur mission and spread over ideology of Christianity; and then studied the regional languages of Assam. At that time they used the Roman script to write and transcript oral corpus as well as collected oral literatures and in writing the grammar based on spoken variety of Bodo language of Darrang district. Initially Roman script was used by Christian Missionary to write Bodo language, which is available now in written documents in the form of books. Roman script is also known as Latin script, i.e. a set of graphic signs designed based on the letters of the classical Latin alphabet. It is the basis for the largest number of alphabets of writing system and is also the basis of the IPA.

HISTORICAL EVIDENCE OF USING ROMAN SCRIPT

In Missionary period literature evidence are available where Roman script was used suitably and conveniently. As evidence it may be mentioned a title of monograph '*Essay the first on the Kocch, Bodo and Dhimal Tribes*'; it is one of the most establishing work on the aborigines of India written by B. H. Hodgson in 1846 and printed by J. Thomas, Baptist Mission press in 1847, Calcutta. This book was basically written in three parts, part I.- Vocabulary, Part II.- grammar and in Part III.- Location, Numbers, Creed, Customs, Condition, Physical and Moral Characteristics of the people. It is mentionable that the term 'Bodo' was coined as generic term for the first time in this book.

EVIDENCE OF TRANSCRIPTION

Reverend Sidney Endle was also conveniently used Roman script for writing the Bodo language. A remarkable book is '*Outline Grammar of the Kachári (Bàrà) Language, as spoken in District Darrang, Assam;*' in 1884. It is a grammar book. The next was written by Rev. L. O. Skrefsrud '*A short grammar of the Mech or Bodo language*' in 1889. J. D. Anderson had also compiled and published a book on Bodo folk literature in 1895 namely '*A Collection of Kachari Folk-tales and Rhymes*'. In 1904 A. Christiansen had written a Bodo grammar and dictionary namely '*Grammar and Dictionary of Kachari Language*'. "*This script was used to teach the Boro children in the year 1904 in 'Cachari Reader*'.

⁴ Baro, M. R: 1990, The History of the Boro Literature, p.34

published by the Government of Assam.”⁵ From 1904 to 1936 by introducing the ‘Cachari Reader’ text book, education was imparted to the Bodo Children in primary schools of Assam. ‘The Kacharis’ is also another famous book written by Rev. Sidney Endles which was published in 1911 after his death with an introductory note by I. C. S. (retired) J. D. Anderson. This is a monograph where an account of Kachari (Bodo) race is elaborately described including their characteristics, physical and moral; Origin, Distribution and Historic summary, Social and Domestic life, Laws and Customs, Religion, Folk-lore, traditions, superstitions, specimen of grammar etc.

Thus G. A. Grierson also incorporated his work materials on Bodo philology using roman script in the ‘Linguistics Survey of India’, Vol.-III, Part-II in the year 1903, which was one of the remarkable research worked on Bodo language. Using of roman script in this pioneer work is given bellow with some examples:

Table 1

	Father	Mother	Eldest Son	Eldest Daughter
My	<i>āng-ni ā-fā.</i>	<i>āng-ni ā-i.</i>	<i>āng-ni ā-dā.</i>	<i>āng-ni ā-bā.</i>
Your	<i>nang-ni nang-fā or nam-fā.</i>	<i>nang-ni nam-mā.</i>	<i>nang-ni nang-dā.</i>	<i>nang-ni nang-bā.</i>
His	<i>bī-ni bī-fā.</i>	<i>bī-ni bī-mā.</i>	<i>bī-ni bī-dā.</i>	<i>bī-ni bī-bā.</i>

(Page No. 16)

With the sample texts of some Bodo folktales the book ‘Outline Grammar of the Kachari (Bārà) Language, as spoken in District Darrang, Assam;’ is incorporates some sentences in details. Some relic examples of using Roman script are given bellow:

Example-1

“Gāhàm hoásá,” a good man.

“Gāhàm hingzháúsá,” a good woman.

(Page No. 11)

Example-2

How far is it from Tezpur to Orang? “Tezpurifrai Oranghá lági bèsè gāzàn?”

It will be hard to get there in one day. “Sánsèáu bíkhô manhúinũ thán záagan.”

(Page No.59)

All above these are historical evidences of using Roman script during the Missionary period. It is seen that the text extracted from the grammar book of Endle is to be marked as spoken variety of Bodo language of Darrang district. The sentence was made transcript into Roman orthographic sign with a number of diacritic marks to define the mode of articulation.

ANALYSIS ON SCRIPTS AND DIACRITIC MARKS USED BY MISSIONARY

⁵ Narzary Kanakeswar(ed.): 1993, Roman (English) script and Boro Sahitya Sabha, p.2

There are six vocalic phonemes i.e. / i, u, e, o, a / all the six vowels are voiced and short vowel and Sixteen consonantal phonemes i.e. / p^h, b, t^h, d, k^h, g, m, n, ŋ, s, z, h, r, l, w, y / in Bodo language, where /w/ and /y/ are Semi vowels of Segmental features. Using of /u/ sound is one of the special characteristics in Bodo language. It is seen that the segmental and supra-segmental phonemes; and diacritics are used in peculiar manner during missionary period. Here discussion may be done as given below:

Example of Vowels with Words

/i/	=	/i/: unmarked, short, as in English ‘pin’; in Bodo e.g. ‘Ling’ meaning ‘call’ ‘Bíni’ meaning ‘his’ ‘Mai’ meaning ‘paddy’ /i/: long, as in English ‘marine’; in Bodo e.g. ‘Bí’ meaning ‘he’ ‘Mànsūí’ meaning ‘man’ ‘díni’ meaning ‘to-day’
/u/	=	/ũ/: this is the representation of vowel /u/. Using of this sound makes special characteristics in Bodo language. in Bodo e.g. ‘Bũnũ’ meaning ‘to drag, pull’ ‘dũí’ meaning ‘water’ ‘árũ’ meaning ‘and’
/u/	=	/u/: unmarked, short, as in English ‘pull’ in Bodo e.g. ‘Hingzháu’ meaning ‘woman’ ‘dáu’ meaning ‘bird’ ‘gubun’ meaning ‘other’ /ú/: long, as in English ‘pool’ in Bodo e.g. ‘Búnũ’ meaning ‘to beat’ ‘Záu’ meaning ‘rice beer’ ‘Mosaú’ meaning ‘cow’
/e/	=	/e/: unaccented, as in English ‘bed’ in Bodo e.g. ‘Gădet’ meaning ‘great’ ‘Bâbe’ meaning ‘which’ ‘Zeblá’ meaning ‘when’ /ê/: as ‘ey’, as in English ‘they’ in Bodo e.g. ‘Mêgan’ meaning ‘eye’ ‘Bê’ meaning ‘this’ ‘Bêáu’ meaning ‘here’ /è/: an intermediate sound between the two former in Bodo e.g. ‘Bèsè’ meaning ‘how much?’ ‘Horsè’ meaning ‘all night’

		‘Khaisè’ meaning ‘some’
/o/	=	/o/: unmarked, short as in English ‘stop’ in Bodo e.g. ‘Mosá’ meaning ‘tiger’ ‘Lábo’ meaning ‘bring’ ‘Gorai’ meaning ‘horse’ /ô/: long as in English ‘bone’ in Bodo e.g. ‘Núnggô’ meaning ‘yes’ ‘Bíkhô’ meaning ‘him’ ‘mithígô’ meaning ‘understand’
/a/	=	/a/: unaccented, always short as in English ‘America’ in Bodo e.g. ‘Nang’ meaning ‘you’ ‘Mairang’ meaning ‘rice’ ‘Mai’ meaning ‘paddy’ /á/: long as in English ‘father’ in Bodo e.g. ‘Tháng’ meaning ‘go’ ‘Oá’ meaning ‘bamboo’ ‘Házu’ meaning ‘mountain’ /à/: sharp, short sound as in English ‘pan’ in Bodo e.g. ‘Mànsúí’ meaning ‘man’ ‘Thàm’ meaning ‘three’ ‘Dàn’ meaning ‘cut’ /ã/: broad sound as in English ‘call’ in Bodo e.g. ‘Bâbe’ meaning ‘which’ ‘Bârã’ meaning ‘Boro’ ‘Gãthã’ meaning ‘child’

Use of Diacritic Marks

It is seen that the Missionary used the following diacritic marks to make convenient the mode of articulation of the phonemes.

/ũ/: This is the representation of vowel /u/; and used for marking High back un-rounded vowel.

/â/: The upper case as marked at the top of the /a/ used for marking back rounded vowel.

/ã/: The top rafar as marked at the top of the /a/ used for marking low central un-rounded vowel as nasal sound.

To Mark the Supra-Segmental Features

The following diacritic marks were used for marking high tone, low tone, and high-low tone.

/´/: This mark represents high tone.

Example: ‘Oá’ meaning ‘bamboo’
‘Tháng’ meaning ‘go’

/ `/: This mark represents low tone.

Example: 'Thàm' meaning 'three'
'Dàn' meaning 'cut'

/ ^/: It represents high-low tone.

Example: 'Bíkhô' meaning 'him'
'Mithígô' meaning 'understand'
'Mêgan' meaning 'eye'
'Bê' meaning 'this'

CONCLUSIONS

From a diachronic discussion it has been observed that Christian missionary was the pioneer for introducing Roman Script with some changes and modifications to make convenient the writing system of Bodo language. They used some peculiar types of diacritic marks to represent the manner of articulation. Especially they used three types of diacritics marks, i.e. to mark the tonal character like / `; ^ / and to mark the segmental features (particularly vowel phonemes). It is also observed that Missionaries attempted to translate some portions of the 'Bible' and the religious books from English version into Bodo. Transcription was also made in respect of Bodo oral literature.

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