Interdisciplinary Journal of Linguistics
Volume [17] 2024, Pp. 239-246

GENDER DISTINCTION IN BODO AND TIWA: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

Laheram Muchahary*

ABSTRACT

Bodos and Tiwas are the major tribes of Assam and important ethnic groups of north-east India. Racially, both, are of Mongoloid origin and linguistically they belong to the Bodo-Naga sub-group of Tibeto-Burman group of Sino-Tibetan language family. Bodo language is one of the scheduled languages of India. It is spoken mainly in Assam and its adjacent areas of North Bengal, Nepal and Bangladesh. Tiwa is mainly spoken in the districts of Nagaon, Morigaon and Kamrup. They are also found in small scattered areas of Karbi Anglong, Lakhimpur and Jorhat districts of Assam and some areas of Meghalaya. Tiwa language is found only in oral form. Gender is a part of morphology. Gender is not grammatically marked in Bodo and Tiwa and so it does not affect the grammatical pattern of the language. Gender distinction in Bodo and Tiwa is determined on the natural recognition of sexes. In this paper, an attempt will be made to highlight the gender distinction of both Bodo and Tiwa languages spoken in Assam in a comparative manner.

Key words: Bodo, Tiwa, Language, Gender

1. Introduction:

Bodo and Tiwa are the major tribes of Assam and important ethnic groups of north-east India. Racially both, Bodos and Tiwas are of Mongoloid origin. The Bodos reside mainly in the state of Assam and in neighbouring states of North Bengal, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland. They are also found in Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh. On the other hand, Tiwas are mostly found in the districts of Nagaon, Morigaon, Kamrup,. Karbi Anglong, Lakhimpur and Jorhat districts of Assam and some areas of Meghalaya. In older linguistic literature Tiwas are known as Lalung. However, they prefer to call themselves as Tiwa, while the name Lalung was used only by the non-Tiwas. According to the census of 2011, the total population of Bodo and Tiwa in India is 1.45 million and 371000 (approx.) respectively.

* Girls' College, Kokrajha

The terms 'Bodo' and 'Tiwa' signify both the name of language and the community. They are members of the great Bodo race. Ethnically, the Bodo and Tiwas are of Mongoloid origin. They have close affinities with other constituents of the Bodo group like Dimasa, Kokborok, Garo, Rabha, Hazong etc. Both the Bodo and the Tiwa languages have originated from Tibeto-Burman group of greater Sino-Tibetan language family. According to G.A, Grierson's *Linguistic Survey of India (Vol.III Part III*), these two languages belong to the Bodo group under Bodo-Naga section of Assam-Burmese group under Tibeto-Burman branch of Sino-Tibetan language family. Bodo language is spoken in all the Bodo concentrated areas of Assam and adjoining areas of the state. It is one of the scheduled languages of India and one of the developing languages of North-East India. Tiwa language is found only in oral tradition and is spoken among the Tiwa people only. Some of them have lost their language due to the influence of Assamese language. They use Assamese language for their everyday exchange of thoughts. Since Bodo and Tiwa languages belong to same language family, they share more or less common linguistics features.

2. Review of Literature

A good number of research works are found on Bodo language. Pramod Chandra Bhattacharyee's *A Descriptive Analysis of Bodo Language*, Madhuram Boro's *The Boro Structure: A Phonological and Grammatical Analysis*, and Phukan Chandra Basumatary's Structure *of Boro Language* are the remarkable research works on this language. On the other hand, only a few works are available on Tiwa language. G.A. Grierson's *Linguistics Survey of India (Vol.III Part.II,1903-1928)* gives us the first-hand information about the Tiwa (Lalung) language for the first time. Reverend M. Balawan's *Outlines of* '*Lalung Grammar*, which was published in 1975, was the first grammar of Tiwa language written in Roman script. U.V. Joseph and Robbins Burling's *The Comparative Phonology of Boro-Garo language (2006)* is the most important book from the linguistic point of view. In this book, they have outlined the inventory of phonemes and phonological features of Tiwa language. A comprehensive study on gender distinction of Bodo and Tiwa will bring out some of the characteristics feature of these two languages. Since no research work has been undertaken on Bodo and Tiwa from a comparative point of view, an attempt will be made to find out some similarities and few differences of negation of the concerned languages. The prime focus of this paper is to discuss the process of gender distinction in both Bodo and Tiwa languages in a comparative manner.

3. Data and Methodology

The data have been collected from two main sources: primary and secondary. The secondary data was collected from the available written sources in the form of books, journals, articles etc. The primary source is mainly based on the speech data of the native speakers. The informants include persons of different age groups, occupations and sexes.

3.1. Process of Gender Distinction

Gender is a part of morphology. According to David Crystal Gender is 'a grammatical category used for the analysis of word classes displaying such contrasts as masculine, feminine and neuter, animate and inanimate, etc.' (2008:206). On the basis of semantical-morphological criteria, nouns are primarily classified into two classes, viz, animate and inanimate. Both human and non-human nouns are differentiated for masculine and feminine genders. All the inanimate nouns are considered neuter.

Since Bodo and Tiwa belong to same language family some similarities are found between these two languages. Gender of both languages can be classified into two distinct genders, i.e. masculine and feminine. Gender distinction in Bodo and Tiwa is determined on the natural recognition of sexes. Gender is not grammatically marked in Bodo and Tiwa and so it does not affect the grammatical pattern of the language. Therefore, both Bodo and Tiwa have only natural genders. The gender distinction processes of both languages can be discussed under three main heads-

i. By employing free words
ii. By using attributive words
iii. Adding suffixes to the nouns

3.2. By Employing Free Words

Gender distinction can be made by employing different types of free words for masculine and feminine in both Bodo and Tiwa languages. These types of free words indicate male and female independently. They are lexically marked as masculine and feminine. This is evident in the use of kinship terms. Some examples of free words which can signify masculine and feminine gender in Bodo are shown as below.

Examples in Bodo

Masculine	Feminine
/ap^{h}a/ 'father'	/ai/ 'mother'
/ada/ 'elder brother'	/bazɯi/ 'elder brother's wife'
/abou/ 'grandfather'	/abɯi/ 'grandmother'
/bihao/ 'father-in-law'	/bik^{h}unzɯ/ 'mother in-law'
/gumɯi/ 'brother-in-law'	/abo/ 'elder sister'
/p^{h}isai/ 'husband'	/bisi/ 'wife'

/amai/ 'maternal uncle'	/anɯi/ 'maternal uncle's wife'
/pʰisazla/ 'son'	/bihamzɯ/ 'daughter in-law'

Like Bodo, Tiwa has also lot of free words which indicate masculine and feminine gender independently. The following are the examples which are extensively used in kinship terms.

Masculine	Feminine
/paba/ 'father'	/ma/ 'mother'
/kʰai/ 'elder brother'	/paozi/ 'elder brother's wife'
/azo/ 'grandfather'	/abi/ 'grandmother'
/hu/ 'father in-law'	/niu/ 'mother in-law'
/punsi/ 'brother-in-law'	/pai/ 'elder sister'
/soi/ 'husband'	/si/ 'wife'
/mamai/ 'maternal uncle'	/ani/ 'maternal uncle's wife'
/sa/ 'son'	/niu/ 'daughter-in-law'
/pantʰai/ 'young boy'	/kʰorla/ 'young girl'

3.3. By Using Attributive Words

Attributive words referring to different sexes (male and female), which precede or follow the nouns are frequently applied in both Bodo and Tiwa languages. These attributive words distinctly qualify and mark whether the nouns are masculine or feminine. Bodo and Tiwa have gender markers for both masculine and feminine. In Bodo /houwa/ 'male' and /hinzao/ 'female', /zɯla/ 'male' and /zɯ/ 'female' are used to refer to human nouns. For example- Masculine
Feminine

/houwa pʰoraisa/ 'male student'	/hinzao pʰoraisa/ 'female student'
/houwa sutʰur/ 'male foe'	/hinzao sutʰur/ 'female foe'
/houwa mansi/ 'male person'	/hinzao mansi/ 'female person'
/houwa lɯgɯ/ 'male friend'	/hinzao lɯgɯ/ 'female friend'
/houwa alasi/ 'male guest'	/hinzao alasi/ female guest'
/pʰisa zɯla/ 'son'	/pʰisa zɯ/ 'daughter'
/pʰisou zɯla/ 'grand-son'	/pʰisou zɯ/ 'grand-daughter'

Besides these, there are some animals indicating attributive words in Bodo i.e. /dambra/-/dambri/, /baŋgra/-/baŋgri/, /bunda/-/bundi/ etc. For example-

/bɯrma pʰanʰta/ 'male goat'	/bɯrma pʰantʰi/ 'female goat'
/sɯima baŋgra/ 'male dog'	/sɯima baŋgri/ 'female goat'
/oma bunda/ 'male pig'	/oma bundi/ 'female pig'
/maozi bunda/ 'male cat'	/maozi bundi/ 'female cat'
/mɯsou dambra/ 'male calf'	/mɯsou dambri/ 'female calf'
/dao zɯla/ 'cock'	/dao zɯ/ 'hen'
/zɯla haŋsɯ/ 'male duck'	/zɯ haŋsɯ/ 'female duck'

The gender of animate nouns in case of human beings in Tiwa is denoted by the markers /mewa/ 'male' and /margi/ 'female'. For example-

Masculine	Feminine
/mewa libiŋ/ 'male person'	/margi libiŋ/ 'female person'
/mewa sigaisa/ 'male student'	/margi sigaisa/ 'female student'
/mewa čor/ 'male friend'	/margi čor/ 'female friend'
/mewa sudur/ 'male foe'	/margi sudur/ 'female foe'
/mewa kork^{h}iya/ 'male child'	/margi kork^{h}iya/ 'female child'
/mewa alohi/ 'male guest	/margi alohi/ 'female guest'
/mewa k^{h}amsamai/ 'male servant'	/margi k^{h}amsamai/ 'female servant'

In case of animals the marker /mosowa/ meaning 'male' is used with the generic form of nouns to denote masculine and /musluŋ/ meaning 'female' is used to denote feminine gender. But in case of 'goat', Tiwa language uses the marker /ʃaga/ to denote masculine gender where the marker of feminine is same as like any other animal. Again, in case of 'cock' and 'hen' this language uses other marker to denote masculine and feminine gender like /daŋra/ and /magra/ respectively. For example-

/masu mosowa/ 'ox'	/masu musluŋ/ 'cow'
/wa mosowa/ 'male pig	/wa musluŋ/ 'female pig'
/mis mosowa/ 'male buffalo'	/mis musluŋ/ 'female buffalo'
/meʃa mosowa/male tiger	/meʃa musluŋ/ 'female tiger'
/prun ʃaga/ 'male goat'	/prun musluŋ/ 'female goat'
/tu daŋra/ 'cock'	/tu magra/ 'hen'

3.4. Adding Suffixes to the Nouns

According to many linguists, gender distinction by adding suffixes to the nouns is not found in Sino-Tibetan language family. Generally, the use of this principle belongs to Indo-Aryan language family. But since Bodos and Tiwas have lived together for long time in north east region basically in Assam, they have shared certain common linguistic characteristics with Assamese language. It is said that gender formation by suffixation to the nouns in both Bodo and Tiwa is influenced by Assamese or other Indo-Aryan languages. Bodo has three different feminine gender markers i.e. /-i/, /-u/ and /-e/. All these three feminine markers replace the vowel ending /-a/ of the masculine words. For example-

Masculine	Feminine
/beŋga/ 'deaf man'	/beŋgi/ 'deaf woman'
/k^{h}ana/ 'blind man'	/k^{h}ani/ 'blind woman'
/boba/ 'dumb man'	/bobi/ 'dumb woman'
/hait^{h}a/ short man'	/hait^{h}u/ 'short woman'

/gaitʰa/ 'short man'	/gaitʰu/ 'short woman'
/nabla/ 'man with flat nose'	/nable/ 'woman with flat nose
/hoŋla/ 'man with hollowed nose'	/hoŋle/ 'woman with hollowed nose
/balonda/ 'widower'	/balondi/ 'widow'
leŋgra/ 'lame man'	/leŋgri/ 'lame woman'
/pʰagla/ 'mad man'	/pʰagli/ 'mad woman'
/zamba/ 'fool man'	/zambi/ 'fool woman'

In Tiwa also gender distinction is made by adding gender markers or suffixes to the nouns. Gender marker like /-i/ is used to form the feminine gender in place of vowel ending /-a/ of the words.

For example-

Masculine	Feminine
/ kʰala/ 'deaf'	/ kʰali / 'deaf woman
/kʰana/ 'blind man'	/kʰani/ 'blind woman'
/obra/ 'dumb man'	/obri/ 'dumb woman'
/palunda/ 'widower'	/palundi/ 'widow'
/kʰora/ 'lame man'	/kʰori/ 'lame woman'
/paola/ 'mad man'	/paoli/ 'mad woman'
/peŋa/ 'fool man'	/peŋi/ 'fool woman'
/laŋka/ 'immoral man'	/laŋki/ 'immoral woman'
/kʰaŋora/ 'crazy man'	/kʰaŋuri/ 'crazy woman'

But in case of personal pronoun both Bodo and Tiwa do not make any other gender distinctions. Same pronoun can substitute nouns referring to male and female. For example:

/bi/ 'he/ she' (Bodo)

/pe/ 'he /she' (Tiwa)

4. Conclusion

It is observed from the above discussion that the gender distinction of Bodo and Tiwa is almost same except for a few differences. In both the languages, gender distinction is made only on the basis of animate nouns. In case of personal pronoun both Bodo and Tiwa do not make any gender distinctions. Same pronoun can substitute nouns referring to male and female. Gender does not affect the grammatical pattern of the language in Bodo and Tiwa. Therefore, both Bodo and Tiwa have only natural genders.

References

Abbi, Anvita (2001). *A Manual Liguistic Fieldwork and Structure of Indian Languages.* Germany: Lincon Europa.

Baishya, Ajit Kr. (2003*). The Structure of Nagamese: The Contact Language of Nagaland.* Assam University, Silchar

Balawan, M. (1975). *Outlines of Lalung Grammar.* Shillong: Don Bosco Technical School.

Basumatary, P. (2005). *An Introduction to the Boro Language*. New Delhi: Mittal Publications.

Benidict, Paul. (1972). *Sino-Tibetan: A Conspectus. Cambridge*: Cambridge University Press.

Bhattacharya, P.C. (1977). *A Descriptive Analysis of Boro Language*. Guwahati-14: G.U. Press.

Bloomfield, L. (Reprinted 1996). *Language.* New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas Publishers.

Bordoloi, B.N. Sharma, G.C. Saikia, M.C. 1987. *Tribes of Assam. Part-I.* Guwahati, Tribal Research Institute.

Brahma, Kamal Kr. (Reprinted 2005). *Gwnang Raokhanthi*. Guwahati: Bina Library.

Chainary, Swarna Prabha. (2006). *Boro Raokhanthi*. Guwahati: Gumur Publication.

Chetterjee, Suniti Kumar. (Reprinted 1998). *Kirata Janakriti*. Calcutta: Asiatic Society.

Crystal, David. 1992. *A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics*. Blackwell Publishers.

Endle, Sidney. (1990). *The Kacharies*. New Delhi: Low Price Publication.

Gait, E. 1926. *A History of Assam,* (Reprinted 1992), Guwahati: Lawyer's Book Stall.

Goswami, S.N. (1998). *Studies in Sino-Tibetan Language*. Guwahati: Gauhati University.

Grierson, G.A. (1903-28). *Linguistic Survey of India*, Vol. III Pt. (Reprinted 1967-68) Delhi-Vanarasi: Motilal Vanarasidas.

Hyslop, Gwendolyn, Morey, Stephen, Post, Mark W. (2013). *North East Indian Linguistics.* Vol. No. 5. New Delhi: Foundation.

Joseph, U.V and Burling Robbins. (2006). *The Comparative Phonology of Boro Garo Language.* Mysore: CIIL.

Katamba, F. (1993). *Morphology*. New York: Palgrave Mcmilan.

Kholar, V. Len. (2004). *Tiwa Matpadi.* Guwahati: Tiwa Mathonlai Tokhra.

Mathew, P. (1975). *Morphology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Morey, Stephen, Post, Mark. 2008. *North East Indian Linguistics*. New Delhi: Foundation

Thakur, Dr, G.C. Sarma (1985). *The Lalungs (Tiwas).* Guwahati: Tribal Research Institute.