LANGUAGE CONTACT AND LINGUISTIC CHANGE: A SOCIOLINGUISTIC STUDY OF BODO AND ITS INTERACTION WITH OTHER LANGUAGES OF NORTHEAST INDIA

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Abstract

Bodo demonstrates that a language can retain its character while changing due to long-drawn contact with neighbouring languages. The regular user-contact is also evident in the written usage and spoken forms. The vocabulary and bilingual speech patterns that clarify the interaction of various Assamese and other Indo- Aryan languages. At the same time, apparent similarities between Bodo, Dimasa, Garo require careful historical comparison before we conclude that certain words or structures have been borrowed rather than inherited in common. Analyses of code-switching, lexical borrowing, phonological adaptation and institutional language choice must, therefore, be seen as distinct but related processes. Scholarship published prior to 2018 takes a balanced view: while Bodo developed within a multilingual area, its own identity cannot be explained merely through contact with surrounding languages. The survival of the Bodo language does not depend so much on the prevention of linguistic influence but more on its meaningful use in society by the next generation. A historically conscious and socially responsible outlook can accept linguistic change as a natural phenomenon and support community engagement in language maintenance.

Keywords: Bodo, Boro, language contact, Assamese, multilingualism, borrowing, code-switching, Northeast India.

1. Introduction

The people who speak the Bodo language are found in varying parts of the northeastern India and the adjoining region. In the state of Assam, they are mostly settled in the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) or Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) area; however, Bodo-speaking communities also live in other parts of Assam. Bodo speakers are found outside Assam in northern West Bengal, especially in areas bordering Assam, and Meghalaya, especially in the Garo Hills and Tikrikilla areas. They also live in Tripura as well as in areas near the Assam–Arunachal Pradesh and Assam–Nagaland borders. Outside India, Bodo-speaking members of the larger Bodo tribal ethnic group are found in neighboring Nepal, mainly Jhapa District, and Bangladesh, mainly Mymensingh. A Bodo-speaking population can be found in such diversity over such a large area**.** North-east India is a region where trans-community interactions seem more likely, and boundaries between languages and geography or politics may not coincide. Those who speak Bodo are connected to Assamese and other related Indo-Aryan languages, English, and various related Tibeto-Burmans. Daily work, learn, marry, trade, and change administration. The perspective of language contact is therefore helpful to the development of Bodo. Nonetheless, understanding contact requires a certain dissociation between the presence of several languages and the demonstrated structural change (Weinreich; Thomason).

Bodo belongs to the Bodo-Garo group of languages that includes Dimasa (Rabha, Kok-borok) and Garo. Similar features or characteristics common to these closely related languages may have a common descent. Unlike their Indo-Aryan counterparts, Assamese and Bengali, whose long contact with Bodo offers an easier framework to analyze the process of lexicon borrowing and adaptation. Scholars working in linguistic area formation often argue that long-term multilingualism can lead to language convergences. However, such instances must first be brought forth with comparative evidence before being able to focus on specific languages. The aim of the paper is neither to present Bodo language as completely uninfluenced by other languages for the better or worse. Speakers of two languages actively select expressions that are tailored to their audience, workplace, and relationships. Contact facilitates expression and translation while also showing unequal access to major institutions. We can account for linguistic change happening together with language loyalty and language revival by analysing those forces at work (Fishman; Aikhenvald).

2. Objectives and Method

The present study aims to study the various major situations of language contact relating to Bodo in both the past and present. The study of language change in contact circumstances concentrates on lexical borrowing, phonological accommodation and code-switching. It also distinguishes contact-induced changes from shared similarities inherited through common linguistic ancestry. The research further analyses the contribution of education and writing systems and institutional practices to the growth of the Bodo language. These developments will have significant impacts on the documentation, preservation, and maintenance of languages.

The research adopts the perspective of sociolinguistics with a focus on the history and language of Bodo, patterns of multilingualism and literature published prior to 2018. The discussion is based on already published literature and not original fieldworks, interviews and quantitative surveys. So, the arguments below reflect established linguistic tendencies and quite likely processes of language contact without claiming any new statistics or estimates of frequency. With Matras and Winford's approaches in mind, the paper stresses the relevance of examining the etymological history of linguistic forms before labelling them as borrowings. It is important to make the distinction so that one would know whether the similarities between Bodo and other languages nearby are due to borrowing, common origin, or language contact more generally.

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3. Historical and Regional Contact Ecology

The areas mentioned above were occupied by Bodo communities for a long time due to agriculture exchange, rivers movement and local market. In these settings, it is common for people to speak more than one language. Bodo is geographically near related varieties and Assamese speaking settlements, as per historical descriptions. According to Grierson, Endle, this situation has allowed for many opportunities for contact in the normal course of social activity. The extensive utilization of Assamese in numerous administrative, educational and extended inter-community contexts throughout the region has rendered it a major contact language for a substantial number of Bodo speakers. While Bengali influence differs according to space and time, Hindi works in a wider space of interregional functioning and vice versa. English has been primarily bonded with formal education, high technology and specialised professions. It is incorrect to suppose that these three functions are equivalent in all districts or generations: sociolinguistic repertoires vary according to settlement, mobility and schooling (Baron, Fishman).The concept of "language contact" needs to

take into account the unequal social positions. The dominant language is chosen not because of the inexperience of the mother tongue but that some institutions work through the dominant language. On the contrary, Bodo terminology, standardized forms and educational material created consciously can push back the borrowed domains towards Bodo-medium.

4. Borrowing and Lexical Innovation

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5. Phonological and Grammatical Accommodation

When borrowing words from other languages, speakers modify the sound, the pattern of syllables, the quality of vowels, and the stress of the borrowed words to, as it were, accommodate these with the entire phonological system of their language. Brahma's analysis of Assamese loanwords in Bodo highlights these modifications and accounts for how borrowed forms are adapted to the phonological features of Bodo. The adaptation of the non-Bodo words which is also referred to as Bodonisation by Basumatary and Chainary can also be a good basis for understanding how foreign linguistic elements are being Bodooped. Analysis of contact must seek to identify not just words, but also other linguistic influences from foreign sources. There is also the issue of modifying the borrowed item to fit the phonetics and grammar of the money lender's language. Such adaptations show the Bodo language is a strong determining element of its own structure even if borrowed from another language.However, establishing structural influence is more challenging than lexical borrowing. Language similarity doesn't mean borrowing that attribute from another language. For example, the same grammatical categories of languages do not prove borrowing. They can arise due to a common origin from linguistic ancestry, greater regional phenomena, or independent developments. Explanations of resemblances between Bodo and Dimasa, for instance, has to use historical and comparative linguistic evidence, it should not be attributed to contact-induced change very recently. The presence of regular sound correspondences and larger comparative evidence is a stronger basis to establish a relationship of languages than isolated similarities. Any claim regarding grammatical convergence should take into account the nature of the linguistic feature, the communities of speakers involved, its geographical and social distribution, and the likely period of change. In the absence of adequate evidence, it is better to identify an area for further investigation

than to conclude that a permanent structural change has taken place. This perspective also allows us to differentiate between short-term patterns of bilingual language use and long-lasting alterations to the grammatical system of Bodo (Heine & Kuteva; Matras).

6. Code-Switching and Everyday Bilingualism

Code-switching and code-mixing are common features of multilingual communication in which speakers use two or more languages or language varieties within the same conversation or discourse. Although closely related, the two terms are not always used interchangeably in sociolinguistic research. These practices may serve different communicative purposes, including changes in subject matter, audience, social relationships, and institutional settings. In the case of Bodo-speaking communities, a speaker may use Bodo while communicating with family members, Assamese when interacting with people in a marketplace, and English when discussing technical matters with doctors, engineers, or other professionals. Such examples illustrate the possible social functions of multilingual communication rather than findings established through a new field survey. They also suggest that language choice is influenced by the immediate social environment, the relationship between speakers, and the purpose of communication.

Distinguishing lexical borrowing from code-switching is not always straightforward, particularly when the available evidence consists of written transcripts. Borrowed words may gradually become established in the vocabulary of the receiving language and undergo changes in pronunciation or grammatical form. Code-switching, on the other hand, may involve the use of words, phrases, or larger linguistic structures that retain features of another language. The distinction therefore requires careful consideration of the frequency of usage, social distribution, speakers' linguistic competence, grammatical integration, and conversational context. A word of non-Bodo origin should not automatically be treated as an instance of code-switching, especially when it has already become an accepted part of everyday Bodo vocabulary. As discussed in the approaches associated with Poplack and Winford, identifying the relationship between borrowing and code-switching requires attention to both linguistic structure and actual patterns of language use.

Multilingualism also forms an important part of the social and cultural experiences of many Bodo speakers. The ability to communicate in several languages does not necessarily weaken a speaker's attachment to Bodo or their sense of cultural identity. Individuals may use different languages in different social situations while continuing to regard Bodo as their mother tongue and an important part of their cultural heritage. However, a strong emotional attachment to a language, or an expressed preference for using it in formal and cultural activities, does not automatically ensure its continued transmission within families. The regular use of Bodo in everyday household communication, particularly between generations, remains an important consideration in understanding language maintenance. The sociolinguistic perspectives associated with Gumperz and Fishman suggest that multilingual practices should be examined in relation to social interaction, community relationships, and patterns of language transmission. Ethnographic observation can therefore provide a more meaningful understanding of Bodo language use than a simple division between supposedly 'pure' and 'mixed' forms of speech.

7. Education, Script and Language Policy

Institutions decide which languages get writing systems, technical vocabularies, and careers. In 2003, Bodo was formally recognized in the “Eighth Schedule” of the Indian Constitution through the ninety second amendment of the constitution. Certainly, constitutional recognition is one thing,

and real patterns of usage are another. To ensure effective maintenance of any language, various mechanisms are required: teaching resources, trained teachers, publication networks and more use opportunities (besides token use). The link between language and group identity is illustrated in the history of script choice. Over the ages and periods, the Bodo writing has undergone various scripts. It officially adopted the Devanagari script. The orthography standardization may open the door for sharing materials between the schools and the publishers even as practices tied to the spelling and transliteration may still differ across the media in communities. According to Baro, Grenoble and Whaley, the decisions regarding scripts are social, educational and technical.

A person who can speak Assamese Hindi and English can enter more fields of study and work. Bodo, conversely, has local knowledge and a relationship with the community. The either response does not have to sharply separate these roles to be beneficial. Fishman programme planning and terminological planning one can gain competency in one or more languages without loss of Bodo.

8. Related Languages and the Problem of Shared Inheritance

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In contrast, Bodo has local knowledge and rapport with the community. The either response need not to sharply differentiate between these roles to be helpful. According to UNESCO, a Fishman programme planning and terminological planning enables a person to acquire proficiency in one or several languages without losing Bodo.

9. Sociolinguistic Implications and Future Research

The principal sociolinguistic issue is not whether Bodo changes due to language contact – significant change is unavoidable – but whether future generations will continue to learn and speak Bodo in daily life. The vibrancy of a language relies on its passing down from one generation to the next. Further, educational opportunities, local institutions, and cultural activities also play a key role. When the pressures of linguistic prestige restrict the settings in which younger speakers routinely use Bodo (Fishman; Grenoble and Whaley), they become pressing.

The future field study should record conversations of rural and urban Bodo speakers of various ages, education levels and occupations. Corpora could tell occasional switching of languages apart from established borrowing and consider changes in their pronunciation and spelling. Community-based documentation should cover different forms of communication – digital, academic, as well as traditional knowledge relating to agriculture, oral narratives, and ecology (Matras; UNESCO).

The speakers' views themselves are also worth considering. Labeling borrowing as cultural decline or a sign of modernisation carries social assumptions staff should investigate rather than take at face value. Interviews on education, employment, language loyalty and prestige may help explain

when multilingualism opens up possibilities and when changing choices may indicate gradual weakening of Bodo transmission between generations (Bourdieu; Myers-Scotton).

10. Domains, Generations and Public Communication

The borrowing of words in our spoken language and various other things cannot be termed an ecology. A Bodo family may use that language among themselves, Assamese when dealing with officials, English for a university assignment and Hindi when speaking to outsiders. Choosing a lingua franca does not signify that the first one is weak. It can show effective management in multilingual environment. If the child is getting education and entertainment in a different language all the time and hardly gets to use Bodo with peers, such domain choices accumulate over time and affect the transmission pattern. Fishman believes that people's loyalty to a given language as a marker of identity (Fishman).

Research can be conducted in marketplaces and within employment environments. In dialogue between speakers of two distant languages, a local tongue may act as the first language for negotiation. By constantly repeating this exchange the speakers might acquire the technical vocabulary of business and administration. However, actual use needs to demonstrate the movement of individual forms into Bodo. A measurement, will gather similar conversations at shops, transport terminus and administrative offices. Afterwards this will show whether potential loans recur among speakers of different levels (Matras ; Weinreich).

The comparison can show whether older bilingual speakers see the forms as foreign while younger speakers see them as ordinary Bodo terms. Young educated speakers, on the other hand, may consciously choose newly standardised Bodo equivalents. Changes in perception, in and of themselves, do not secure phonological or morphological integration; therefore, each of these possibilities. Evidence suggests lexical changes are always almost instantaneously according to Barot's and Poplack's work during that period.

Print culture and media also goes through a similar process. As people edit, teach and present performances, they accordingly address audiences with overlapping repertoires in orthography and vocabulary with translation and other adjustments. Using a generally acceptable term in conversation may not look to be out of place in an answer at the examination. Another term we will choose for official publication may remain uncommon in the parlance of every household. The language conventions do not stem from one top level map-maker, but rather the interaction of the community and the institutions involved. Bourdieu's research on languages examines how a language variety differs in importance across school, administration and family settings.

Bennett states that interviews should match sociolinguistics observations. Which language, scholars may ask parents, is used to tell stories? Which language, say teenagers, is used in text messages? Which language do community associations use to make speeches and write notices? There should be a record of the speakers' various explanations (for convenience, for solidarity, for fear of getting it wrong, so as to get a job, etc). People don't consider people's multilingual capacity as a rejection of the heritage code and don't find a genuine shift in language to be not the same as flexible bilingual behaviour.

Ultimately, the comparison with the other Northeast linguistic must reference their institutions history. Both the Bod0 and Assamese people face the issue of Assamese. However, a lesser lined-up variety may be a different order of pressure from Bodo. By making a number of comparisons, we can track the recurrence of fate. Users of Bodo language, a Tibeto-Burman language (Bodic

branch) often fail to make sense of the words and vocabularies that are culturally encapsulated and out-of-reach for them.

11. Conclusion

Bodo demonstrates that a language can retain its character while changing due to long-drawn contact with neighbouring languages. The regular user-contact is also evident in the written usage and spoken forms. The vocabulary and bilingual speech patterns that clarify the interaction of various Assamese and other Indo- Aryan languages. At the same time, apparent similarities between Bodo, Dimasa, Garo require careful historical comparison before we conclude that certain words or structures have been borrowed rather than inherited in common. Analyses of code-switching, lexical borrowing, phonological adaptation and institutional language choice must, therefore, be seen as distinct but related processes. Scholarship published prior to 2018 takes a balanced view: while Bodo developed within a multilingual area, its own identity cannot be explained merely through contact with surrounding languages. The survival of the Bodo language does not depend so much on the prevention of linguistic influence but more on its meaningful use in society by the next generation. A historically conscious and socially responsible outlook can accept linguistic change as a natural phenomenon and support community engagement in language maintenance.

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