

A FEW SIMILARITIES FOUND IN BORO AND KOKBOROK: THE TWO LANGUAGES OF NORTH-EAST INDIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to explore the similarities and dissimilarities appearing in case of few domains of the Boro and Kokborok, the languages of Assam and Tripura. It tries to highlight the phonological similarities and dissimilarities these two languages have in case of segmental and suprasegmental phonology. In segmental some phonemic changes occurring in both the languages have been given. Tone is a very important suprasegmental feature of both the languages. In case of word formation compounding and agglutinating occupy a prominent place and have been tried to include in the paper citing few examples. The similarities and dissimilarities in few morphological processes and exceptions have been taken care of in this paper.

KEYWORDS: Agglutinating, Compounding, Negativization, Segmental, Suprasegmental, Tone

INTRODUCTION

The Boro and Kokborok are the two languages among others developed from the Tibeto-Burman branch of the Sino-Tibetan language family. These languages sprung out from the same root in the distant past and its speakers shifted to different places of their convenience. Today, the Boros have their basic concentration in Assam and the Kokboroks in Tripura. But their concentration is not a factor for them and despite their concentrations in different areas maximum similarities are found in different levels of grammatical structures as well as in lexis of these two languages. Today both the language speakers are keeping close contact to each other and some comparative study on both the languages are also coming up.

PHONOLOGICAL SIMILARITIES AND VARIATIONS

Phonology is considered to be the foundation of a language. Both the languages have the same number and forms of vowel phonemes though it differs a little in case of the consonants which are not equal in number and in form.

Vowel

The Boro and Kokborok language have six (6) distinct vowels which are short vowels, not long. The six vowel phonemes both the languages have are -/i u e ə a/. Some phonemic contrasts of these vowels are given below:

/ɔ / vs. /a/:	Boro: gɔn 'stick'	gan 'wear'	Kokborok: p ^h ɔn 'placenta'	p ^h an 'power'
/i/ vs. /e/:	Boro: sir 'pour'	ser 'press'	Kokborok: bir 'fly'	ber 'to lay'
/u/ vs. /ɔ/:	Boro: bu 'strike/heat'	bɔ 'spread'	Kokborok: bu 'strike/beat'	bɔ 'he/she'
/ɥ / vs. /a/:	Boro: duɥu 'feed'	dau 'bird'	Kokborok: suɥi 'dog'	sai 'respect'

/u/ vs. /u:/	Boro: dui ‘be small’	duji ‘water’	Kokborok: tui ‘lay egg’	tuji ‘water’
/e/ vs. /a:/	Boro: sen ‘fishing trap’	san ‘count’	Kokborok: berem ‘row/line’	beram ‘disease’

In these languages the phonemes can occur in all the positions of words.

		Initial	Medial	Final
/i/:	Boro	isiŋ (kitchen)	zibuŋu (snake)	zi (cloth)
	Kokborok	imaŋ (dream)	chibuk (snake)	ri (cloth)
/uŋ/:	Boro	uŋ (be)	nuŋi (two)	huŋ (to give)
	Kokborok	uŋ (be)	nuŋi (two)	ruŋ (to give)
/u/:	Boro	udis (objective/aim)	k ^h ur (dig)	bu (strike/beat)
	Kokborok	udis (objective/aim)	bubar (flower)	bu (strike/beat)
/e/:	Boro	eba (or)	geseŋ (thin)	t ^h uŋule (shallow)
	Kokborok	eba (or)	keseŋ (thin)	t ^h ene (shallow)
/ɔ/:	Boro	ɔr (fire)	k ^h ɔn (surround)	rɔrɔ (non-stop)
	Kokborok	ɔk/ɔg (belly)	k ^h ɔn (surround)	rɔrɔ (non-stop)
/a/:	Boro	aŋ (i)	k ^h ar (run away)	za (eat)
	Kokborok	aŋ (i)	k ^h ar (run away)	cha (eat)

Consonants

Boro language has the use of sixteen (16) consonants including two semi-vowels. These are -/b d g p^h t^h k^h s z h m n ŋ r l w y/. Kokborok language has a total of twenty (20) consonant phonemes including two semi-vowels. These are -/p t k b d g p^h t^h k^h s ch z h m n ŋ r l w y/. The four consonant phonemes of Kokborok language / p t k ch / are absent in Boro language. Except these four all consonant phonemes are same in both the languages.

All the consonants have not their initial, medial and final occurrences in the words in both the languages. Though all the consonants have their medial occurrences some have not their initial and some have not their final occurrences. The phonemes which have not their initial occurrences in Boro language are / ŋ w y / and those which have not their final occurrences are / p^h t^h k^h g s h /. Though /z/ occurs word finally its occurrence seems to be very minimum and as a native speaker the researcher has till date encountered only one word ending with /z/. In case of Boro language it is seen that the voiceless consonants never occur word finally. On the other hand some of the voiced phonemes may or may not occur word finally in the language. The phoneme which has not its initial occurrence in Kokborok language is / ŋ / and which have not their final occurrences are / p^h t^h k^h ch s z h /. So, the consonant phonemes which are not used word finally are almost same in both the languages except /g/ and /z/. /g/ is not used in the final position of the words in Boro, but is used in Kokborok. As the use of /z/ in the final position of the word is very minimal so, in a broad sense it can be considered same to the Kokborok language that /z/ is not used in the final position of the word even in Boro. So, after comparison of occurrences and non occurrences in different positions of the words it can be observed that Kokborok language has words ending either with the voiced or voiceless; but Boro language has words ending only with the voiced

phonemes (may also be voiceless if it is a loan word, but never in basic vocabulary). Below is going to put some comparative specimen from both the languages what happens to the phonemes in Boro language when they either begin or end with the voiceless or voiced phonemes in Kokborok language. A few specimens-

- As mentioned earlier, Boro language has not the use of the sounds /p t k ch/ but the Kokborok language has the use of these phonemes. So, what happens to the Boro words when a word begins or ends with /p t/ and begins with /ch/ or are in the medial position in Kokborok language is given below:

	Kokborok	Boro	English
Kb. p > Br. b	p ^h ɔp	p ^h ɔb	to burry
	pap	p ^h ab	sin
Kb. t > Br. d	tuji	duji	water
	tuɰk	duɰ	earthen pot

(Here the last consonant 'k' is automatically deleted in Boro as the language has not the use of this phoneme)

Kb. k /p> Br. g/b	kap	gab	to cry
Kb. ch > Br. z	chap	zab	to heap
	cham	zam	be old

- The Boro words ending with /l/ seems to be very rare, but the Kokborok language has a lot of words ending with /l/, that is why the words ending with /l/ in Kokborok language takes the form of /n/ in Boro language in most of the words. A few examples:

	Kokborok	Boro	English
Kb. l > Br. n	k ^h al	k ^h an	to comb
	p ^h al	p ^h an	to sell

- Kokborok language has not the use of consonant clusters but the Boro language have. This language has a lot of consonant clusters either in the beginning or in the middle of the words, but is never used word finally. A few specimens here: **sraŋ** 'light' a-**dra** 'half' bu-**bli** 'moment/time' etc.

In the examples mentioned above all the clusters are coming together in a single syllable, but sometimes it may come in more than one syllable i.e. as sequence of consonants. Different types of sequence of consonant combinations are available both in Boro and Kokborok languages, e.g.

Boro: san-za (east, sequence of nasal and fricative)	zaŋ-k ^h ri (shake, sequence of nasal and stop)
Kokborok: baŋ-k ^h uŋ (red ant, sequence of nasal and stop)	bir-k ^h uŋ (aeroplane, sequence of trill and stop)

- Segmental phonemes of both the languages have the following similarities:
 - In both the languages length of vowel does not affect the meaning of the words;
 - The use of the /uɰ / is very common in both the languages;

- Both the languages have six vowels each and
- Both have not the use of retroflex.

Tone

Tone is a very peculiar and common suprasegmental feature of both the languages. These languages have very simple tone i.e. high tone and low tone and in both tone is lexical not grammatical. Here, high tone is going to be represented by ¹ before the beginning of the syllable where maximum prominence falls and low tone by ² where the prominence doesn't fall. It is noteworthy that tone is used in all the positions of words in these languages.

	Initial		Medial		Final
Boro:	¹ ai	mother	¹ zab	fold	¹ za eat
	² ai	income/profit	² zam	become old	² za be
Kokborok:	¹ ai	dawn	¹ t ^h aŋ	be alive	ru- ¹ wa leech
	² aŋ	i	² t ^h aŋ	go	ru- ² wa axe

Besides the examples of tone included above a brief comparison is going to be made below on the tones used in the words having same orthography in both the languages.

B. & Kb.	¹ t ^h uŋi	blood	² t ^h uŋi	to die
	¹ t ^h aŋ	be alive	² t ^h aŋ	go

MORPHOLOGY

Morphology is the main body and the largest area of study of a language. Here, it is very difficult to discuss on each and every aspects of morphology available in both the languages and so proposes here to give a glimpse on some common features available in both the languages.

Agglutinating Character

Agglutinating is one of the most important features of the Tibeto-Burman group of languages and also of the Boro and Kokborok languages. One common feature to be mentioned here is that both the languages have prefix and suffix but not infix. So, by agglutinating one may mean either the agglutinating of words i.e. compound words as well as prefix or suffix agglutinating or the agglutinating of both. A few specimens here-

Compoundisation

Compoundisation here means the combination of two or more words belonging to same grammatical category or different grammatical categories. These categories are basically nouns and verbs in both the languages. Here, attempt has been made here to include the compoundisation of two words each from both the languages.

Br & Kb.: v. bu-v. t^har> v. but^har (to kill by beating) Br. n. mai-n. duŋ> n.mayenduŋ (rice pot)

Kb. n. mai-n. tuŋk> n. maituŋk (rice pot)

In the above examples it is seen that in the two examples from Boro and Kokborok compoundisation of two words have been done without any changes but in the other morphophonemic change of /i/ to the semi-vowel /y/ and the one more insertion of the vowel /e/ is taking place in the Boro language.

Prefix & Suffix Agglutinating

Both the languages have the process of agglutinating of prefix or suffix; prefix and suffix or suffixes at a time. But the combination of more than one prefix at a time to a word or words is never allowed in the languages, e.g.

Br. p^hɔ-rʉŋ-giri-p^hʉr-ni > p^hʉrʉŋgirip^hʉrni (of the teachers')

In this example of Boro language p^hɔ- is a causative formation prefix; rʉŋ is a verb representing the meaning of to know/learn; -giri is a suffix representing the meaning of owner; -p^hʉr is a plural suffix and -ni is a genitive marker. When p^hɔ- prefix is added to the verb rʉŋ the ɔ vowel of the prefix p^hɔ- takes the form of ʉ due to distant regressive vowel assimilation which is again same to Kokborok language in the example given below. Here, in this example from Boro language one prefix and three suffixes at a time have been added with the verb. The structure of Kokborok word given below is also completely same to the Boro language.

Kb. p^hɔ-rʉŋ-nay-rɔg-ni > p^hʉrʉŋnayrɔgni (of the teachers')

Noun Formation

Nouns are found in basic and derived forms in both the languages. Derived nouns which are mostly verbal nouns are formed by adding prefix or suffix to the verbs. This character is very common in both the languages and seems to be productive, e.g.

Using Prefix

{bi-, gi-} of Boro and {bu-, ki-} of Kokborok are the prefixes used to form nouns from verbs respectively in Boro and Kokborok, e.g.

Boro: bi-v. bar (bloom) > n. bibar (flower) gi-v. sib (to fan) > n. gisib (fan)

Kokborok: bu-v. bar (bloom) > n. bubar (flower) ki-v. chip (to fan) > n. kichip (fan)

In the above examples the prefix bi- of Boro has been changed to bu- in Kokborok, a change of vowel taking place from i > u; in the second example, the prefix gi- of Boro has been changed to ki- in Kokborok a change occurring from g > k the other vowels remaining the same. Here, the change is taking place among the stops. Like this in verb 'sib' of Boro and 'chip' of Kokborok the change is taking place among sibilants s and ch respectively and the stop b and p which is highly allowed as per the linguistic rule.

Using Suffix

Some of the suffixes seem to be very productive or performing their grammatical duties in both the languages. Though noun formation suffixes are not small in number two suffixes each from both the language is going to be included here. The suffix -nay included here from both the languages though seems to be similar represent different meanings. In Boro, when added to the verb it represents the act of doing anything and in Kokborok when added to the verb it represents human noun. In both the languages it functions as class changing derivational suffix.

Boro:	v. p ^h an-gra > n. p ^h angra (seller)	v. muṣa-nay > n. muṣanay (dancing)
Kokborok:	v. p ^h al-nay > n. p ^h alnay (seller)	v. muṣa-ma > n. muṣama (dancing)

Here, in these examples –gra from Boro and –nay from Kokborok are representing the same meaning i.e. representing the human (doer or performer) and the other two suffixes i.e. –nay of Boro and –ma of Kokborok are representing the action done by the persons.

Besides the above mentioned systems of noun formation derived from verbs, both the languages have also the system of combining one noun and one verb to form noun. Such type of structure is not very abundant in the language. A few specimens here-

Boro: n. ha (soil)-v. sib (sweep) > n. hasib (broom)	n. dau (bird)-v. duṣi (lay egg) > n. dauṣi (egg)
Kokborok: n. nək (house)-v. sib (sweep) > n. nəksib (broom)	n. tək (bird)-v. tui (lay egg) > n. təkui (egg)

One more important point is that like other Tibeto-Burman languages of North-East India the names of the fruits, birds, animals and fish are formed either by the combination of one free and one bound morpheme or the two free morphemes in both the languages.

Names of Fruits, Birds and Animals

Fruit, bird and animal names of the languages like Boro, Garo, Dimasa, Tiwa and Kokborok mostly start with the words like t^hai, t^he or tai for fruit; dau, dɔʔɔ, tɔ/tək for birds and mi, mɔ, ma, mat, mu for animals. To represent different variety of fruits, birds or animals some verbs as well as different bound forms are suffixed to these forms. It is assumed that if these words are not available in the names of fruits, birds or animals then these are thought to be borrowed from the Aryan languages which are close neighbor to these language speakers. A few specimen of such structure are-Br. n.t^hai(fruit)-v.lir(be heavy)>n.t^hailir & Kb. n.t^hai(fruit)-v.lik (be heavy)>n.t^hailik ‘banana’; Br. & Kb. n.amlai ‘phyllanthus emblica’; Br.n.dau(bird)-k^ha>n.dauk^ha & Kb.n.tək(bird)-a>n.təka ‘crow’ Br.n.sigun & Kb. n.sikruk ‘vulture’; Br. n.mi (animal)-sa>n.muṣa & Kb. n.mɔ (animal)-sa>n.mɔsa ‘tiger’ Br.n.gɔrai & Kb.n.kɔrai ‘horse’

The above combinations show in some words noun and verb combination; noun and bound base combination. In such type of combination sometimes distant regressive vowel assimilation is taking place though these seem to be rare. The words for phyllanthus emblica (local name amlək^hi), vulture and horse have not that type of structure and are the borrowings from neighboring Aryan languages Assamese and Bengali in the contexts of Assam and Tripura respectively.

Kinship Terms

Kinship terms are also a very interesting subject of study from structural point of view in both the languages. In these languages, personal pronouns are always accompanied by the bound base of the kinship terms to represent my (aŋ ‘I’ in Boro and Kokborok), your (nuŋ, you in both) and his/her (bi ‘he/she’ in Boro and bɔ ‘he/she in Kokborok). The kinship terms given below show the accompaniment of one personal pronoun and one bound base of the kinship terms in these languages, e.g. Br.aŋ-da>ada: Kb.aŋ-ta>ata ‘my elder brother’; Br. nuŋ-da>nuŋda; Kb. nuŋ-ta> nuṭa ‘your elder brother’; Br.bi-da>bida; Kb.bɔ-ta> bɔta ‘his/her elder brother’

During the addition of the personal pronouns and the bound base of the kinship terms some minor change is taking place in some of the kinship terms basically with the ellision of one or two phonemes from the personal pronouns.

Some kinship terms which are established through the social institution of marriage never accompanied by the first person of personal pronoun in both the languages but can take 2nd and 3rd persons, e.g. Br. gumuꞑi~Kb. Kumui (my brother-in-law), Br. bazuꞑi~Kb. **bɔchi** (sister-in-law). These two examples from both the languages are the terms of address used without the addition of any first person personal pronouns. Their 2nd and 3rd person forms are: Br. nuꞑgumuꞑi~Kb. nuꞑkumui (your brother-in-law), Br. nuꞑmbazuꞑi~Kb. nuꞑbɔchi (your sister-in-law)

On the other hand some kinship terms established by social institution of marriage is always accompanied by the plural suffix representing the meaning of singular in both the languages, e.g. Br. bewai (younger sister's husband) is addressed as bewai-p^huꞑr (-p^huꞑr is a plural suffix)> bewaip^huꞑr, k^huꞑina (new bride, also used to address the younger brother's wife)-p^huꞑr>k^huꞑinap^huꞑr; Kb. buwai (younger sister's husband)-rɔg (-rɔg is a plural suffix)> buwairɔg, kra (father-in-law)-rɔg> krarɔg. These plural suffixes are not representing the plural meaning but singular meaning with due honour to the person/persons addressed to. When it is to be pluralized then one more plural suffix -sɔŋ is added in Kokborok, but no such suffix is used in Boro language, e.g. Kb. buwai-rɔg-sɔŋ (younger sister's husband and others), Kb. kra-rɔg-sɔŋ (father-in-law and others).

Numerals and Numeral Classifiers/Definitives

The counting systems of numerals are almost same in both the languages except some minute variations of one or two. In both the languages numerals are discussed under basic and derived. The numerals from one to ten are basic numerals besides zuꞑu (100), ruꞑa (1000) in Boro and k^hɔlpe (20), rasa (100), saisa (1000) in Kokborok. The remaining is formed under the process of derivation. Specimen are- Br. se~ Kb. sa (one); Br. nuꞑi~ Kb. nuꞑi (two); Br. t^ham ~Kb. t^ham (three); Br. bruꞑi~ Kb. buꞑruꞑi (four); Br. ba~ Kb. ba (five); Br. dɔ~ Kb. dɔk (six); Br. sni~ Kb. sini (seven); Br. dain~ Kb. char (eight); Br. gu~ Kb. chuku (nine); Br. zi~Kb. chi (ten). Besides a few specimen of basic numerals mentioned above both the languages have also the system of derived numeral formations by the process of addition, multiplication, multiplication and addition respectively. One example each from all three processes are like this- Br. zise (zi + se=10+1=11), Kb. chisa (chi+sa=10+1=11); Br. t^hamzi (t^ham x zi= 3 x 10=30), Kb. t^hamchi (t^ham x chi=3x10=30); Br. nuꞑizise (nuꞑi x zi+se=2x10+1=21), Kb. k^hɔlpechise (k^hɔlpe x chi +se=2x10+1=21) etc.

Like numerals, the uses of numeral classifiers or definitives are also almost same in both the languages. Classifiers which represent different shapes, forms or quality of different animate human, non-human as well as of different inanimate things or objects are always prefixed to the numerals in both the languages. A few common uses of definitive from both the languages are included here-

Boro: muꞑsa(tiger) ma(cl.)-se(one) or ma(cl.)-se(one) muꞑsa(tiger) 'tiger a or a tiger'

Kokborok: muꞑsa(tiger) ma(cl.)-sa(one) or ma(cl.)-sa(one) muꞑsa(tiger) 'tiger a or a tiger'

{ma-} is a common classifier in both the languages and is used with the living beings, animals, insects etc.

Boro: lama(road) duꞑŋ(cl.)-se(one) or duꞑŋ(cl.)-se(one) lama(road) 'road a or a road'

Kokborok: lama(road) tuꞑŋ(cl.)-sa(one) or tuꞑŋ(cl.)-sa(one) lama(road) 'road a or a road'

VERBAL GROUP

In verbal group of both the languages, the grammatical categories verbs (being the head), adjectives and adverbs are included because of the formation of adjectives and adverbs from the verbs. But here the only target is to show the similarity seen in case of negative formation and the structure of adjectives of both the languages. For negativization both prefix and suffix are used to the verbs. A comparison of this prefix and suffix from both the languages are given below:

Negative Formation

Negative Formation Prefix

Both the language have one each negative formation prefix. These are **da-**in Boro and **ta-**in Kokborok. These prefix when added to the verbs either don't change their form or the form of the verbs, e.g.

Boro: da-v.su (wash) >v.dasu 'don't wash' da-v.za (eat) >v.daza 'don't eat'

Kokborok: ta-v.su (wash) >v.tasu 'don't wash' ta-v.cha (eat) >v.tacha 'don't eat'

Negative Formation Suffix

Like prefix, the negative formation suffix is also one each in both the languages and their forms are same in both. This common form used in both the language is **-a**. This suffix has three different allomorphs. These are **-a,-ya,-wa** and are phonologically conditioned.

- **Use of the Allomorph {-a}:** {-a} allomorph is used with the verbs ending with the consonants.

Br.&Kb.:v.bar(bloom)-a> v.bara (don't/doesn't bloom); v.bam(take on lap)-a> v.bama (don't/doesn't take on the lap)

- **Use of the Allomorph {-ya}:** {-ya} is used with the words ending with the vowels a, e and i.

Boro: v.za (eat)-a> v.zaya (don't/doesn't eat); v.se (snatch)-a>seya(don't/doesn't snatch)

Kokborok: v.cha (eat)-a> v.chaya (don't/doesn't eat): v.k^hui(be hungry)-a> v.k^huiya (don't/doesn't become hungry)

- **Use of the Allomorph {-wa}:** This allomorph is used with the words ending with u and ɔ.

Br. & Kb.: v.su (to measure/be cold)-a>v.suwa (don't/doesn't measure/ not become cold)

v.hu (rub)-a>v.huwa (don't/doesn't rub) etc.

The above mentioned are only a few specimen of phonologically conditioned allomorphs or morphophonemic change or alternation. Both the languages have such more examples to explain.

ADJECTIVE FORMATION

Adjectives of both the languages can be divided into basic and derived based on their structure. Basic adjectives are independent adjectives and derived are formed either by using prefix or suffix to verbs in both the languages. Basic adjectives are very few and are mostly disyllabic in both the languages.

Using Prefix

The adjective formation prefix used with the verbs in Boro is gɔ- and kɔ-in Kokborok. The vowel ɔ attached with the prefix g and k can take different forms based on the first vowel available in the verb. But mɔ-prefix is also seen using with a very limited number of words both in Boro and Kokborok, e.g.

Boro	Kokborok	Gloss
gɔ-v. k ^h uɟi (be sour)>adj. guɟk ^h uɟi	mu/mɔ-k ^h ui/k ^h ɔi (be sour)>adj. muk ^h ui/mɔk ^h i	sour
mɔ-v. k ^h uɟi (be sour)>adj. muɟik ^h i		sour
gɔ-v.ham (be good)> adj. gaham	kɔ-v.ham (be good)> adj. kaham	good

Using Suffix

Boro language has different types of suffixes used with the verbs to form adjectives. In this language adjective may also be formed by the combination of two verb roots. In Kokborok language -zak is a very common suffix used with the verbs to form adjectives, but no such structure is available in Boro language, e.g.

Boro: v. suɟm (be black)-k ^h uɟr>adj. suɟmk ^h uɟr (greeny)	v.nay (see)-v.t ^h ɔ (be tasty)>adj. nayt ^h ɔ (beautiful)
Kokborok: v. ham (be good)-zak>adj.hamzak (love)	v. kiri (to fear)-zak>adj. kirizak (fearful) etc.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper tries to explore some of the similarities these two cognate languages have in two levels of the structure phonology and morphology. These two languages sprang from a common source in the dim and distant past and have a lot of similarities in different levels of linguistic analysis and a comparative study on these languages will definitely encourage the linguists and researchers to undertake more and more research works on these two isolated languages of North-East India. On the other hand to make these languages known to the rest of the world no proper study has yet been done either by the native speakers or other well wishers of the languages. So, the target of this paper is to give a glimpse on these two languages and explore to the world about their rich and beautiful language structure.

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