

A Typological Study of words in Kokborok Language of Tripura

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ABSTRACT: *This paper attempts to analyze the word typology of the Kokborok language which shows some striking peculiarities in case of structure and features of word-formation. Kokborok is similar to other Tibeto-Burman language. Particularly in case of word structure it may be compared to the languages of Boro, Garo, Dimasa, Rabha, Tiwa, and Deuri-Chutiya. Here may be observed certain kind of ancestral features in the structure of words though it has acquired agglutinating characteristics in course of time. From a structural point of view Kokborok is a suffix adding language where suffix plays influential role in the process of word formation.*

KEYWORDS: *Typology, Features, Tibeto-Burman, Cognate, Word-formation.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The term ‘Kokborok’ denotes the language of the ethnic linguistic community known as Boroks¹, an ethnic group inhabiting in the state of Tripura with a large number of population. The language of the Boroks is being presently introduced as the language of educational institutions and as official language in the Tripura Autonomous District Council. The literary works in Kokborok language are flourishing as the part of written literature. They are keeping up a correspondence very closely to the **Boro-Garo**² group of linguistic communities of the Northeast India. Their concentrations are found chiefly in Tripura³; besides its adjoining state like in Assam especially in the Kachar district of Assam. In the Sylhet district of Bangladesh, the Kokborok linguistic community is also found in small numbers. Kokborok has monosyllabic words as well as derived and compounding words. Though Kokborok acquired hereditary analytical feature in ancient times, they have adapted the nature of agglutination to a great extent. Following are the evidences to consider for the discussion.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study aims at focusing the process of word formation and its structural features of the Kokborok language. The method of analysis is structural. Analysis has been done from a structural point of view. Primary data have been collected from the informants. In the same way, the secondary data have also been collected from other sources. Chiefly Tibeto-Burman word structure has been taken into account as one of the structural as well as typological methods. It is purely a synchronic analysis of Kokborok word-structure.

III. AIMS OF DISCUSSION

The discussion aims to analyze some major aspects of word-structure, e.g. typology of kinship terminology, structure of words of human body parts, word-structure related to animals, birds and other insects, process of formation of adjectives, compounding of nouns and verb typology.

¹ The term denotes man or people in this language. Here ‘Kok’ means speech. Thus Kokborok means speech of the Borok.

² The term is used by linguists of the Tibeto-Burman scholarship to refer to the languages like Boro, Garo, Rabha, Dimasa, Kokborok, Tiwa, Deuri-Chutiya, Hajong, Sonowal and other cognate languages concentrated in North-East India.

³ In demographic picture of populations, the Boroks have placed in the second position next to the Bengali linguistic community. The total number of Kokborok speakers is estimated 31.05% as recorded in 2001 Census Report of Tripura.

IV. KINSHIP TERMINOLOGY AND TYPOLOGY

Kinship terminology used by the native speakers is comparable to the structure of kinship terminology as current in the languages of Boro, Garo and Dimasa. In case of first person, kinship terminology is composed of two morphological components: personal pronoun and bound base having entity of noun class, which is closely related to the first personal pronoun. Likewise, in the second and the third person, the structure of terminology is also the same.

Example⁴:1

- (a) aη (I)-ma (mother)>ama (my mother)
- (b) aη-p^ha (father)>ap^ha (my father)
- (c) aη(I)-bachuηi(sister in law)>aηbachuηi(my sister in-law)
- (d) aη(I)-chu(grandfather)>achu(my grandfather)
- (e) aη(I)-chuηi(grandmother)>achuηi(my grandmother)
- (f) nuη(you)-ta(brother)>nuηta (your elder brother)
- (g) nuη(you)-p^ha(father)>nuηp^ha(your father)
- (h) nuη(you)-ma(mother)>nuηma(your mother)
- (i) nuη(you)-hanɔk(elder sister)>nahanɔk(your elder sister)
- (j) nuη-kumui(brother in-law)>nukumui(your brother in-law)
- (k) nuη(you)-hamzɔk(daughter in- law)>nahamzɔk (your daughter in-law)
- (l) bi(he/she)-ma>bima(his/her mother)
- (m) bi-p^ha>bip^ha (his/her father)
- (n) bi-hanɔk(younger sister)>bahanɔk (his/her younger sister)
- (o) bi(he/she)-hamzɔk(daughter in-law)>bahamzɔk (his/her daughter in-law)
- (p) bi (he/she)-ta (elder brother)>bata (his/her elder brother).

In the above examples lexical morpheme {aη},{nuη} and {bi} refers to I, you, and he/she respectively. To form different kinship terms, a particular kind of kin terms is added with personal pronoun. It is to be noted that this type of process is comparable to other Bodo group of languages.

V. STRUCTURE OF WORDS RELATED TO BODY PARTS

In Bodo group of languages, words related to body parts of human being, animals, creatures and insects, fruits and trees etc are belonging to noun class of words. These are formed by adding affixes with the free morpheme or bound base.

Most of the words in connection with body parts are composed of two different linguistic segments. In this composition the first minimal segment is generally free morpheme, which indicates the particular body part. To get the word indicating name of another body part is to be suffixed a second minimal segment i.e. bound base inevitably used to signify intended body part. Following examples illustrate more on it.

⁴ The data taken for analysis have been gathered from two native speakers of this community. Informants are – Polen Debbarma,50, Agartala, Tripura and Srikumar Debbarma, 49, Agartala, Tripura.

Example:2

- (a) yak (hand)
- (b) {yak-ra}>yakra (right hand)
- (c) {yak-si}>yaksi (left hand)
- (d) {yak-sku}>yaksku (elbow)
- (e) {yak-p^ha}>yakp^ha (palm of hand)
- (f) {yak-pai}>yakpai (foot mark)
- (g) {yak-si}>yasi (finger)
- (h) {yak-uŋ}>yakuŋ (leg) etc.

The examples above are composed of two different segments. The monosyllabic word ‘yak’ means hand in general. While a bound base is added with {yak} it derives a new word. Some of the words like {bu-slai}>bu^hslai (tongue), {bu-k^ha}>bu^hka (liver), {bu-kuŋ}>bukuŋ (nose), {bu-k^huk}>buk^huk (mouth), {mu-k^haŋ}>mu^hkaŋ (face) etc. are words of common structure. In these words, the first segment is a prefix and the second one is morphologically bound base signifying the particular body parts.

It is worth to mention here that Garo structure of body parts is also typically similar to Kokborok language. Here some words of body parts may be mentioned for comparison as in the example in 3.

Example:3

- (a) {bi-k^ha}>bik^ha (heart/ liver)
- (b) {bi-bu^hka}>bibu^hka (intestine)
- (c) {bi-gu^hl}>bigu^hl (skin) etc.

Here {bi-} is added as prefix and the second one is to be considered as bound base that signifies particular part of body. Garo monosyllabic word {zak} is comparable to Kokborok {yak} that means hand. In Garo new words indicating body parts may be derived from the root word {zak}. It derives a new structure of word having a new semantic representation as follows.

Example:4

- (a) zak-si>zaksi (finger)
- (b) zak-si-ma>zak-si-ma (thumb finger)
- (c) zak-asi>zakasi (left hand)
- (d) zak-sk^hu^hl>zaksk^hu^hl (nail) etc.

VI. STRUCTURE OF NOUN WORDS RELATED TO BIRDS, ANIMALS AND INSECTS

Words used for signifying birds, animals and other insects are composed of two different morphological segments. Words related to different kind of birds have two segments. In Kokborok structure the word {ɬk} represents bird. To signify different kind of birds, some specific morphological segments are added with this word as in the following examples.

Example:5

- (a) {tɔ-k^ha}>tɔk^ha (crow)
- (b) tɔ-bak>tɔbak (bat)
- (c) {tɔk-t^hu}>tɔk-t^hu (dove)
- (d) {tɔk-liŋ}>tɔkliŋ (kite)
- (e) {tɔk-ma}>tɔkma (hen)
- (f) {tɔk-sa}>tɔksa (chicken)
- (g) {tɔk-la}>tɔkla (cock)
- (h) {tɔk-tɕi}>tɔktɕi (egg of bird)
- (i) {tɔk-huk}>tɔkhuk (owl) etc.

Words denoting names of some animals are composed of two minimum segments. In Kokborok language, the disyllabic word {mu-suk} means cow, {mɕ-k^hra} means monkey, {mɕ-sa} means tiger, {mu-sui} means deer, {man-dar} denotes squirrel, {mi-sip} signifies buffalo etc. In these words all of the initial syllabic words (used like bound base) have the common semantic representation.

In the above words the second segments are closely related to the particular animals. In case of names of small insects have similarities among the cognate languages. The prefix {mɕ-/mi-} etc. are added before the bound base denoting particular variety of ants. The disyllabic Boro word like {mɕ-sruɕm}-(ant), Garo {mɕ-sruɕm}-(ant), Kokborok {mi-srum}-(ant) are akin to each other.

On the other hand, Rabha and Dimasa do not have this kind of structure, e.g. Rb. {kaŋ-ku}>kaŋku (ant), D. {kai-siŋ}>kaisiŋ (ant). There is also affinity in structure of word denoting fish e.g. Boro {na}-fish, Garo {na^hɔk}-fish, Rabha {na}-fish, Dimasa {na}-fish, Kokborok {a}-fish.

VII. FORMATION OF ADJECTIVES

Formation of adjective is a derivative process in this language⁵. Generally there are two kinds of system. First, prefixes are added to the verb to form new kind of adjectives. In this case, the initial syllable is prefix and the second syllable is verb intransitive as presented below.

Example:6

- (a) {kɔ-sam}>Adj. kasam(black)
Pref. Vr.(be black)
- (b) {ka-ham}>Adj. kaham(well/good)
Pref. Vr.(be good,do good)
- (c) {ku-mun}>Adj. kumun(ripe)
Pref. Vr.(ripen)
- (d) {ku-p^hur}>Adj. kup^hur(white)
Pref. Vr. (be white)
- (e) {ku-t^hug}>Adj. kut^hug(deep)
Pref. Vr.(be deep)
- (f) {ku-uar}>Adj. kuar(broad)
Pref. Vr.(be wide)

⁵ See for details Kokborok BhashaShikshar Asar, a book on Kokborok Language Teaching prepared by Kumud Kundu Choudhury published by Jora Publications, 2008, Agartala, Tripura.

- (g) {kɯ-tʰaŋ}>kɯtʰaŋ(living/alive)
Pref. Vr. (live)
- (h) {kɯ-baŋ}>kɯbaŋ(much/more)
Pref. Vr.Intr. (increase)
- (i) {kɯ-kʰɯji}>Adj. kɯkʰɯji(sour)
Pref. Vr. (be sour)
- (j) {kɯ-pʰuŋ}>Adj. kɯpʰuŋ(fleshy)
Pref. Vr. (be fleshy)
- (k) {kɯ-ran}>Adj. kɯran(dry)
Pref. Vr. (be dry)
- (l) {kɯ-rɯŋ}>Adj. kɯrɯŋ(learned, wise)
Pre. Vr. (know)
- (m){ke- seŋ}>Adj. kesen(thin)
Pref. Vr. (be thin)
- (n) {ki- si}> Adj. kisi (wet)
Pref. Vr. (be wet)

To form an adjective, the suffix {-zak} is added with the verb root as follows.

Example:7

- (a) Vr. rug (boil)-{-zak}>Adj. rugzak (which is already boiled)
- (b) Vr. nug(see)-{-zak}>Adj. nugzak (seen) etc.
- (c) Vr. sug (burn)-{-zak}> Adj. sugzak(burnt)
- (d) Vr. kʰui (be hungry)-{-zak}>Adj. kʰuizak(hungry)
- (e) Vr.tʰaŋ (go)-{zak}>Adj. tʰaŋzak(moving/alive)

VIII. FORMATION OF COMPOUND NOUNS

In Kokborok, compound nouns are generally composed of two different nouns or composition of both noun and intransitive verbs. Both of them are lexical morphemes as follows.

(A) Noun+Noun

Example:8

- (a) ha (soil, earth)+kʰɔr (hole)>hakʰɔr (hole)
- (b) nɔk (house)+tʰai (place)>nɔktʰai (residence)
- (c) mai (rice)+tɯji (water)>maitɯji (rice gruel)

(B) Noun+Verb intransitive

Example:9

- (a) ha (soil,earth)+chɯk(be high)>hachɯk
(hill or high land)
- (b) tɔk (bird)+tui (lay egg)>tɔktui (egg) etc.

Garo structure is also similar to other cognates, e.g.⁶

⁶ See Burling, Robbins. 2004. *The Language of the Modhupuri Mandi (Garo)*, Vol. I (Grammar). New Delhi: Bibliophile south Asia.

Example:10

- (a) nɔ(house)+ma(mother/ big)>nɔma (the main house)
- (b) nɔ(house)+sa (child/ small)>nɔsa (small house)
- (c) dɯi(water)+ma(mother/ big)>dɯima (the great river / big river)
- (d) mɯkrɔn(eye)+k^hi (stool)>mɯkk^hi (eye excreta)
- (e) mɯkrɔn(eye)+chi (water)>mɯkchi (tear) etc.

IX. FORMATION OF VERBAL NOUN

Verbal noun is formed in addition of nominal suffix. Variety of suffix is added with verb/ verb root. Example:

Example:11

- (a) Vr. man (get, acquire)-{-nai}>N. mannai (payee)
- (b) Vr. man (acquire)-{t^hai}>N. mant^hai (right, claim)
- (c) Vr. man (acquire)-{ma}>N. manma (income)

X. VERB AND ITS TYPOLOGY

Causative verb is composed by adding prefix or suffix with verb root. The process is very easy to understand.

(A) Prefix+Verb root

Example:12

- (a) p^hu-nuk>p^hunuk (cause to see/show)
Pref. Vr. (see)
- (b) p^hu-mun>p^humun (cause to ripen)
Pref. Vr. (ripen)
- (c) me-sen>mesen (cause to defeat)
Pref. Vr.(defeat)
- (d) p^hu-ran>p^huran (cause to dry)
Pref. Vr. (get dry)
- (e) p^hu-run>p^hurun (to cause to teach)
Pref. Vr. (know)
- (f) mi- si>misi (to cause to wet)
Pref. Vr. (get wet)
- (g) p^hɔ- lɔk>p^hɔlɔk (to make long)
Pref. Vr. (be long)
- (h) sɔ- tɔn>sɔtɔn (to cause to wide/increase)
Pref. Vr.(be wide/broad)
- (i) si- kiri>sikiri (to cause to fear)
Pref. Vr. (get fear)
- (j) ku- t^hum>kut^hum (to cause to collect)
Pref. Vr. (collect)

In the above examples, it is apparently known that the action is performed by the second person as anticipated/directed by the first person.

(B) Verb root+ Suffix

Causative is also formed by adding suffix with the verb root. While action of the verb is done by the second person with the help of the third person as directed by the first person is to be called causative verb. In this situation first person is the director, second person is the actual agent and the third person is worker. Some of the examples may be mentioned below:

(13) (a) sa(eat)

sa-ru>saru(cause to eat with the help of somebody)

(b) tan(cut)

tan-ru>tanru(cause to cut with the help of somebody)

(c) kap(cry/weep)

kap-ru>kapru(to cause to weep/cry)

(d) p^hal(sale)

p^hal-ru>p^halru(to cause to sale)

(e) sɔŋ(cook)

sɔŋ-ru>sɔŋru(to cause to cook)

XI. CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY

From a structural analysis it is observed that word structure of Kokborok language is comparable to other cognate languages of North-East India particularly with Boro, Garo, Rabha, Dimasa and Deuri-Chutiya languages. Structurally all the languages have acquired a high degree of identical features at all levels of language. Also regarding word-structure it is noticed that they show maximum amount of similarities. Now the analysis may be summarized with the following comments:

1. In this language, structurally most of the basic vocabulary is monosyllabic in nature but the language is absolutely and purely not monosyllabic. Morphologically monosyllabic words are lexical morphemes which are not divisible into smaller segment having independent meaning of its own.
2. Most of the monosyllabic words take prefix or suffix to form different class of words or to attribute different grammatical functions; also to signify semantic representation.
3. Compound nouns are composed of two or more than two nouns or sometimes verb+noun or noun+verb combination.
4. Kinship terminologies are formed by addition of personal pronoun+noun class of bound base which signify specific kin term.
5. Usually adjectives are derived from verb root by addition of prefixes or suffixes.
6. Causative verb is composed by addition of prefix or suffix.
7. Verbal noun is formed by addition of suffix with verb root/ verb intransitive indicating noun class of word.

From a synchronic analysis it is observed that the Borok language is transforming an agglutinating features and typology though they were analytical in features in remote past. Now a day proto-type features are not recurring to a great extent.

ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS

N.- Noun

Adj.- Adjective

Vr.- Verb root

D.-Dimasa

Rb.-Rabha

G.-Garo

Pref.-Prefix

/ʉ/-high-back un-rounded vowel phoneme

/ɔ /- signify mid-back rounded vowel phoneme

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