Tense and Aspect in Assam Sadri

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ABSTRACT: *The present paper aims at discussing the tense and aspect morphemes of the Sadri language as spoken in Assam. The objectives primarily include an introduction to the Sadri language, its demographical spread in Assam, socio-linguistic perspective of the language, the methodology used in the research, literature review of the language and finally the analysis of the verbal and aspectual morphemes of the language followed by conclusion and references. The Sadri language has come under the tremendous influence of the dominant languages Assamese, Bengali and Hindi over its lexical items and sentences. The topic of the research is relevant in the fields of it being a common/ link language among the tea garden community which is on the verge of getting extinct. Sadri consists of all the three basic tenses: Present, Past and Future. There are three Aspectual markers in Sadri: Perfective, Imperfective and Progressive. There is no specific habitual marker. Sadri has two distinct present and past tense copula verbs which behave differently in different tense forms. Sadri have predominantly agglutinating grammatical marking.*
KEYWORDS: *sadri, tense, aspect, present, past, future.*

I.   INTRODUCTION: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND:

Assam's tea industry consists of two million laborers. The East India Company along with the British brought these laborers to Assam in 1830's through 1920's. These tea tribes were the backbone of the Assamese tea industry and they are mostly found in the districts of Darrang, Sonitpur, Nagaon, Jorhat, Golaghat, Dibrugarh, Cachar, Hailakandi, Karimganj, Tinsukia and almost all the districts of Assam. They used to live in tea estates which are situated in interior places.

Most of the tea gardens in Assam were established in the 19th century. After the establishment of Nazira's Assam company many laborers from different parts of India were brought to Assam. The laborers were brought from West Bengal, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Maharastra, Orissa, etc. While travelling to Assam, many laborers died on the way but the exact number of the dead laborers could not be found. The laborers came with their own language. It became difficult for the laborers to communicate their thoughts among themselves. Therefore, to communicate their thoughts clearly they created a separate artificial language in Assam. This language is the Sadri language spoken in Assam. This language as a *link language* spread among them. As because these people from different communities who speak different genetically unrelated or mutually unintelligible languages, have united or came into contact in a certain area but do not share any common language, so they themselves have created a very simplified language for the purpose of very basic communication.

Sadri which is spoken in Assam is termed as *Assam Sadri* to distinguish it from the Sadri spoken in Chota Nagpur Plateau which is better known as *Nagpuriya Sadri*.We can differentiate AS from NS in a way that Sadri,which is spoken in Jharkhand is the language of the *Sadans* or the *Dikhus*, i.e 'outsider' or 'non-tribal'. But the AS is formed as a link language among the various ethnic groups for socio-cultural reasons and need. Sadri is an Indo-Aryan language. Sadri is known by different names. About ninety seven or so heterogeneous communities like Santals, Munda, Kharia, Ho, Oraons have their respective dialects and come under the umbrella term *Adivasis* (Dey,2011:2). The language Sadri unites them in one common stream as Adivasis. Sadri is more similar to Bengali, Oriya and Assamese. These communities mostly belong to three language families namely, Austro-Asiatic, Indo-Aryan and Dravidian. Santals have their own script while Sadri and Munda don't.

The Britishers named the language of the tea tribes as *'kuli baat'* but it was later changed to *Saah bagisar asamiya bhasha*. Now this language is known by different names such as *Sadani/ Sadri* or *Baganiya Asamiya/ Baganiya bhaxa*.

II. DEMOGRAPHY

Demographically, around 20% of the total population of the state of Assamconsists of the tea garden labour community. This accounts to more than 45 lakh tea garden population in the state. The population of the whole tea tribes speaking 'Baganiya' language can be approximately 70 lakh (Sushil Kurmi, 2007). Some of them are Hindu while others are Christians. Durrung tea estate situated in Tezpur consists of 70% of Hindus and 30% have adopted Christian religion. According to 2001 census report there are 2,044,776 Sadri speakers in India. There are 845 tea gardens in Assam.

III. SOCIO-LINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVE:

The speakers of Sadri in the Durrung tea estate are in third and fourth generations of migration and their fathers or grand fathers have migrated from Ranchi and Orissa. These speakers had migrated to Assam which according to them is for obtaining livelihood. Places like tea gardens, market place, public meetings and other organizations where they come in contact with other communities, they communicate in Sadri. Children were also taught Assamese from childhood by their parents as the medium of instruction at the primary level is Assamese. Assamese became their 'Dhatri-Bhasa'. The Assamese language, literature and culture became their dearest one along with the state Assam. The parental generation makes use of the Sadri language. But for the young generation the attitude towards their language is somewhat negative as they are much prone to the dominant language socially, culturally and commercially. Intergenerational transmission is in the verge of being broken at some places but still the child bearing generation still uses the language. Therefore, revitalization efforts are possible which can restore the use of the language in home domains. Shift is seen in the domains of language used due to intervening period of bilingualism. The intervening period is the middle generation.

IV. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES:

The paper mainly intends to establish objectives as mentioned below:
To introduce the Sadri language and its speakers.
To discuss and analyze verbal suffixes in Sadri with special focus on tense and aspect.
To analyze the various types of tense and aspect with examples provided by the native speakers.

V. METHODOLOGY:

Language data have been collected from the Sadri speakers of Durrung tea estate situated in Bindukuri and Bamuni Hills situated in Kalibari in the city of Tezpur which is in the Sonitpur district of Assam where Assamese is the predominant language. Data are also collected through questionnaires and interview methods along with stories and observations. Besides this, language data has been collected from secondary sources like literature reviews of various scholars written in AS, Assamese, Hindi and English. The informants were mainly from the age group of 20-65 years. The study included one tea estate named Bor-Line area of Durrung tea estate of Bindukuri, Sonitpur with a population of approximately 150 houses of Sadri speakers. Other places included Bamuni Hills situated at Tezpur where there are thirteen Munda, Oraon and Kharia speaking families migrating from Jharkhand in the 17th century who speaks Sadri. Language data has also been collected from students of my own college who stays in Nahoroni and Hatibari Tea Estate, Rangapara. Moreover, we can find a place named Pakhyajhar in Tezpur where there is a small village consisting of approximately 100 families who speaks a sub variety of Sadri i.e. *Achi Jachi*. Like Assamese which have many regional varieties, there are separate *Boli* or *Farsi* or *Dowan* prevailing in various regions of the tea tribes.

VI. SADRI LITERATURE:

Though there are some controversies, Raghupati Nripati Nagwansi (1626-1668) is said to be the first writer of Sadri language. Since at least Grierson (1903) there has been general consensus that Sadri belongs to the eastern group of the Indo-Aryan languages. Sadri, as Grierson has described in his 'Linguistic Survey of India', Vol 5 part II, is the sub-dialect of Bhojpuri, which is a dialect of Bihari, an Indo-Aryan language. Some of the books on Sadri language are:

a)*Cha Mazdur Asamia Sabd Aru Khand-bakya Sambhar* compiled by Dewram Tasha, published by Assam Sahitya Sabha (1990).

b)*Axomor cha mazdur git-mator ek hamixiyamulok addhayan* (A critical study of the songs of the tea garden labourers in assam) (1999), PhD thesis by Joytsna Sarmah Bezbaruah. Here, she describes about Assam Sadri in one of her chapters.

c)*Argument Selection in Sadani/ Sadri as spoken in Assam (2011),* PhD thesis by Lucky Dey. Here, he discusses the syntactic and semantic aspects of arguments and predicates in a sentence. She has also discussed about causatives and passives.

d)Dewram Tasha Rasanawali (Essays by Dewram Tasha) by Dewram Tasha, published by Assam Sahitya Sabha (2001). Here, he has devoted all his chapters describing about the stories, rituals, words and phrases, poetries, the variety of languages of the tea tribes, etc.

e)Asamiya aru asomor bhasha-upabhasha (Assamese and language and dialects of Assam) by Upen Rabha Hakasam, published by Gauhati University (2009). Here, he devotes the chapter 9 discussing about the linguistic features of Sadri which includes phonological features and morphological features. The morphological features include suffixes, prefixes, compounding, the Tatsama, Tatbhaba, Desi and Bideshi words. The chapter also deals with verbs along with words used for different purposes.

f)English Sadri Dictionary (1975) by Father Edgar Blain. It was the first dictionary to be published in the Sadri language. The dictionary is very much useful for Sadri speaking students. It also contains catechetical words for non-Sadri speaking missionaries.

Many Sadri magazines were published in various parts of India. *'Gharaiya Guith'*, a montly magazine in Sadri, is published in Shillong. *'Johar Sahiya'* is currently published in Ranchi. *'Veer Birsa', 'Aguwa', 'Nawa Parha', 'NIRANG PAJHRA'* and *'Adivasi Express'* were published in the Dooars and Tarai regions of West Bengal. Many dramas and films are also produced in Sadri language. A film named 'Erabator Xur' by Dr Bhupen Hazarika which came out in the year 1956 evoked the economic condition of the tea tribes. Another film named 'Kesaxun' produced by Hridayananda Agarwala (brother of Rupkonwar Jyotiprasad Agarwala) and directed by Phani Sharma came out in the year 1959. Dr Bhupen Hazarika had already opened the door for Baganiya songs in the 80's in the film called *'Sameli Memsab'*.

VII.   RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

TENSE IN SADRI
Present Tense:

Koul (2008: 105) opines that, "the present tense represents an ongoing action, a habitual, repeated or characteristic action, or simply expresses a fact". There is no specific present tense marker in Sadri. For example:

mɔi   bʰat kʰa-o˜-na
I-NOM rice eat.1SG-IMPERF
I eat rice.

hamreman kʰa-i-la
1pl   eat.1pl-IMPERF
We eat.

tɔi kʰarab ah-i
2SG bad COP.PRES-2SG
You are bad.

zɔn lʌmba a-hɛ/ hɛk-o˜
john tall COP.PRES-3SG
John is tall.

mɔi gan ga-t h-ɛ
I-NOM song sing-PROG AUX.PRES-1SG
I am singing.

u čai bana   h-ɛ
3SG tea make.PFV COP.PRES-3SG
S/he has made tea.

Past Tense:

The past tense places an action or situation in past time. The past tense in Sadri is denoted by the /-l/ morpheme and past progressive is denoted by the /-t, -ʌt/ morphemes (which will be discussed later in the paper).

mɔi bʰat kʰa-l-õ
1-NOM rice eat.PAST-1SG
I ate rice.

muhan kam čɔr-l-ɛk
mohan job left.PST-3SG
Mohan left job.

muhan gʊtʰi-ɔt rah-ɛ
mohan talk.PROG COP.PST-3SG
Mohan was talking.

u-man bʰat kʰa-l-ʌi/kʰa-l-ʌn/kʰai-dɛ-l-ʌn͂
3PL rice eat.PST-3PL eat-give.PST-3PL
They had eaten rice.

Future Tense:

Future tense marks the event expected to happen in the future. The future tense markers in Sadri are /-b/ and /i/. the morpheme /-b/ is used with first and second person singular and plural and third person plural verb forms while the /-i/ morpheme is used with third person singular verb forms.

mɔi   bʰat kʰa-b-õ
I-NOM rice eat.FUT-1SG
I shall eat rice.

hamni pʌrh-b-ʌi
1PL   read.FUT-1PL
We will read.

u   čitʰi likʰ-i
3SG letter write.FUT-3SG
She will write letter.

u-man kʰɛl-ʌt-ɔi
3PL play-PROG.FUT-3PL
They will be playing.

tɔhreman bᵅitʰ rah-b-ᵅ
2PL sit.PFV COP.FUT-2PL
You will have sat.

The tables presented below shows us a sample paradigm of the verb kʰa- 'eat', which will help us remember the Sadri tense forms more easily. This paradigm is based on the data in Nowrangi (ca. 1956: 89ff.)

PRESENT

Person	Singular	Plural
1	kʰaon(a)	kʰail(a)
2 Familiar unmarked	kʰaisla	kʰawal(a)
Familiar polite	kʰawal(a)	kʰawal(a)
Polite	kʰail(a)	kʰail(a)
Honorific	kʰaen(a)	kʰaen(a)
3 Unmarked	kʰael(a)	kʰaen(a)
Honorific	kʰaen(a)	kʰaen(a)

PAST

Person	Singular	Plural
1	kʰalo˜	kʰali
2	kʰalɛ	kʰala
3	kʰalʌk	kʰalʌnɛ˜

FUTURE

Person	Singular	Plural
1	kʰabo˜/kʰabu˜/kʰamu˜	kʰab(ʌi)
2	kʰabɛ	kʰaba
3	kʰai	kʰabʌɛ˜

Sadri has two distinct present and past tense **copula** verbs which behave differently in different tense forms. The copula verbs in Sadri are: /hɛk-/, /rah-/, /hɔ-/ and /ah-/. /hɛk-/ can be substituted by /ah-/ in the present tense. /rah-/ can also be used in future tense in lieu of /hɔ-/. For example:

mɔi daktɔr hɛk-o˜
1SG.NOM doctor COP.PRES-1SG
1 am a doctor.

mɔi daktɔr rah-o˜
1SG.NOM doctor COP.PAST-1SG
1 was a doctor.

mɔi daktɔr hɔ-b-o
1SG.NOM doctor COP.FUT-1SG
I will be a doctor.

mɔi   kʰarap   ah-i
1SG.NOM bad COP.PRES-1SG
I am bad.

tɔi kʰarap ah-is
2SG.NOM bad COP.PRES-2SG
You are bad.

zɔn lʌmba ah-ɛ
john tall   COP.PRES-3SG
John is tall.

u-kɛr   gʰur-ɛk mon ah-ɛ
3SG.GEN travel-NF mind have/COP.PRES-3SG
He has interest in travelling.

hamni-man kʰa-t rah-b-ai
1PL   eat-PROG COP.FUT-1PL
We will be eating.

tɔhre-man baitʰ rah-b-a
2PL   sit.PFV COP.FUT-2PL
You will have seat.

ASPECT IN SADRI:

Aspect expresses how an action, event, or state, denoted by a verb extends over time. Aspect describes "the internal temporal constituency of a situation", or in other words, aspect is a way "of conceiving the flow of the process itself". (Comrie, 1976).

Perfective Aspect:

The perfective aspect morpheme in Sadri is /-ɛ~-ai/. The perfective aspect marker /ɛ/ gets attached with verbs that end with vowels and /ai/ gets attached with verbs ending with consonants. The insertion of these perfective aspects happens only with simple past tense. For example:

am-ta poitʃ dʒa-ɛ h-ɛ
mango-CL rot happen-PFV COP.PRES-3SG
The mangohas become rotten.

u-man likʰ-ai rah-l-ʌi
3PL write-PFV COP.PST-3PL
They had written.

Imperfective Aspect:
The Sadri imperfective is marked by morpheme /-na/, /-la/ and /-ila/ in the present tense. The imperfective markers implies habitual actual and occur after the agreement marker. The imperfective marker /-na/ occurs with nasalized back vowel /oˉ/. The imperfective marker /-la/ is considered as an allomorph of the imperfective morpheme. The allomorph /-la/ occurs with front vowel /i/ and /ɛ/. /-ila/ occurs with the consonant sound /s/ of the second person singular agreement marker. The marker /-na/ is used in case of 1st person singular and 3rd person plural while the marker /-la/ is used in case of 1st person plural, 2nd person and 3rd person singular. For example:

mɔ-kɛ pʰɔl bʰal lag-ɛ-la
1-DAT fruits good feel-3SG-IMPERF
I like fruits.

mɔi bʰat kʰa-oˉ-na
1-NOM rice eat-1SG-IMPERF
I eat rice.

tɔi bʰat kʰa-is-la
2SG rice eat-2SG-IMPERF
You eat rice.

Moreover, the past progressive marker /-t, -ʌt/ can also be used as past imperfective marker. For example:

u seb kʰa-t rah-ɛ
3SG apple eat-IMPERF COP.PAST-3SG
S/he was eating apple.

Progressive Aspect:
The progressive aspect morpheme in Sadri is /-t~ -ʌt/. These markers are the allomorphs of the progressive morpheme. The progressive aspect morpheme /-t/ is attached with the verbs ending with vowel and /-ʌt/ gets inserted with the verbs ending with consonants. For example:

mɔi bʰat kʰa-t-hoˉ
1-NOM rice eat-PROG AUX.PRES-1SG
I am eating rice.

tɔi bʰat kʰa-t-is
2SG rice eat.PROG-PRES-2SG
You are eating rice.

raur-man bʰat kʰa-t-a
3PLrice eat.PROG.PRES-3PL
They are eating rice.

manus-talikʰa-t h-ɛ
person-CL write-PROG COP.PRES-3SG
The person is writing.

u bʰat kʰa-t rah-ɛ
3SG rice eat-PROG COP.PAST-3SG
S/he was eating rice.

mɔi za-t-hi
1-NOM go-PROG.PRES-1SG
I am walking.

u gʊtʰia-t rah-ɛ
3SG talk-PROG COP.PAST-3SG
She was talking.

hamni-man kʰa-t rah-b-oi
1PL   eat-PROG COP.FUT-1PL
We will be eating.

mɔi dʰɛr pɔisa kʰodʒ-ʌt h-o˜
1-NOM lot money want-PROG AUX.PRES-1SG
I am wanting lots of money.

u-sob kʰɛl-ʌt-hɛn
3PL   play-PROG.AUX.PRES-3PL
They are playing.

mɔi čitʰi likʰ-ʌt rah-o˜
1-NOM letter write-PROG COP.PAST-1SG
I was witing letter.

u-man kʰɛl-ʌt-ai
3PL   play-PROG.FUT-3PL
They will be playing.
The progressive aspect morpheme /-t,˜ʌt/ is used in all the three continuous or progressive tenses.

VIII.   CONCLUSION

The Sadri has the agglutinating features like any other Indo-Aryan languages. The present tense do not have any specific present tense marker. The past tense in Sadri is denoted by the /-l/ morpheme. The future morpheme /-b/ is used with first and second person singular and plural and third person plural verb forms while the /-i/ morpheme is used with third person singular verb forms. The copula verbs in Sadri are: /hɛk-/, /rah-/, /hɔ-/ and /ah-/. /hɛk-/ can be substituted by /ah-/ in the present tense. /rah-/ can also be used in future tense in lieu of /hɔ-/. There is no specific habitual aspect marker. The perfective aspect marker /ɛ/ gets attached with verbs that end with vowels and /ai/ gets attached with verbs ending with consonants. The Sadri imperfective is marked by morpheme /-na/, /-la/ and /-ila/ in the present tense. The marker /-na/ is used in case of 1st person singular and 3rd person plural while the marker /-la/ is used in case of 1st person plural, 2nd person and 3rd person singular. The progressive aspect morpheme in Sadri is /-t˜-ʌt/. The progressive aspect morpheme /-t/ is attached with the verbs ending with vowel and /-ʌt/ gets inserted with the verbs ending with consonants.

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