

CIIL Grammar Series—11

MISHMI GRAMMAR

G. DEVI PRASADA SASTRY



सत्यमेव जयते

CENTRAL INSTITUTE OF INDIAN LANGUAGES
Manasagangotri, Mysore-570 006

LINGUISTIC INSTITUTE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
MISHMI GRAMMAR

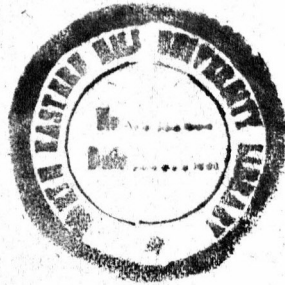
CENTRAL INSTITUTE OF INDIAN LANGUAGES

GRAMMAR SERIES—11

Editor

Dr. E. ANNAMALAI

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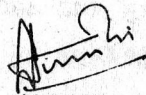
FOREWORD

The Central Institute of Indian Languages set up in 1969 is entrusted with the responsibility of developing Indian languages through research training and material production. The Indian languages are at various stages of development from the point of view of the extent of elaboration of their functions and they require different treatments. Development of the tribal languages of the country involves many issues of policy, implementation and academic contribution. Some of them are to be reduced to writing and most of them need codification from the point of view of standardisation, preparation of grammar, dictionary and such other linguistic materials and production of written literature.

One of the primary activities of the Institute relating to its work on tribal languages is writing a grammar. The grammar is not only the first step in the direction of codification of the language but also is a basic material for the teaching and learning of the language. It also provides materials for the typological and areal comparisons for languages and for studies of language universals. The theoretical notions about grammar have changed substantially in the

recent decades and many of the notions are to be tested with data from various little known languages. It is hoped that the grammar series of the Institute will fulfil at least partially these demands from linguists and language planners.

The grammars of various tribal languages, it is hoped, will lead to a handbook of Indian languages, which will be of great use to the students of linguistics in India. India has a long grammatical tradition and it is now absorbing the grammatical models developed in the West. It will be a worthy goal to achieve to develop a grammatical model for the description of Indian languages derived out of both traditional and modern developments.



(E. ANNAMALAI)
Director

PREFACE

The tribal people in India have for long lived in isolation except to be exposed for exploitation. They have not participated to their benefit in the socioeconomic development of the country. To come out of their isolation, it is necessary for them to learn the language of the majority people around them and a number of them have done so. But this bridges the communication gap only in one way and the whole burden of building up this bridge is carried by the minority group. It is necessary, however, for developing mutual understanding and good-will, to increase bidirectional communication between the tribal people and the majority of people of the region. For this purpose, the majority people, especially those who come in contact with the tribal people for various reasons such as civil administration, security, social service, trade, etc., should learn their language. The Grammar, which forms part of the package consisting of phonetic reader, bi- or trilingual dictionary and teaching manual is prepared to help them in their learning of the tribal language.

The organisation of the Grammar is based on

grammatical functions rather than on grammatical forms. This will help the new learner to find easily how the different functions, which he already knows and wants to express, are formalised in this language. Since this Grammar is primarily meant for pedagogical purposes, theoretical discussions and justifications for a particular analysis are kept to a minimum. The Grammar is divided generally into two broad categories of noun morphology and verb morphology. A description of adjectives and adverbs precedes verb morphology. The chapter on syntax describes the order of the constituents at the surface level.

Though the Grammar is primarily aimed at the language learner and the teacher, it is hoped that it will also be useful to Linguists interested in typology and universals.

Data for the Grammar were collected in the field primarily from one informant by elicitation through word and sentence lists. They were then cross-checked with some other informants. The description may not be exhaustive and there might be gaps. There might be possibilities for alternative analyses. Comments and suggestions passed on to us will be useful to improve our future publication in this series.

E. Annamalai.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work is the product of two field works in Arunachal Pradesh. The data were mainly supplied by Ms. Bimla Chai, Ms. Aruna Basumatari, and Ms. Dicit Mihu. Mr. Akhil Chandra Boro did an excellent job of interpreting.

Mr. I.A. Khan, I.A.S., Deputy Commissioner and Mr. P. Bhaskara Rao, Executive Engineer of the Lohit District, provided the basic infrastructure needed to conduct the field work.

Dr. E. Annamalai, Director, supervised the work from its inception. I have received helpful comments on draft chapters from several people including Dr. M. R. Ranganatha and Dr. M. V. Sreedhar.

Mr. M. G. Kanakaram, Asst. Director (Admn.), was instrumental in hastening the printing of this book as well as the Phonetic Reader.

Mr. V. Gopal, type-composed the manuscript impeccably. My colleagues in the CIIL Press did an excellent job of printing it.

All these people deserve much thanks; and no blame for the gaps and errors which remain.

-- G. Devi Prasada Sastry.

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ABBREVIATIONS

a	...	Aspect
[A]	...	Agent
Abl	...	Ablative
Acc	...	Accusative
Adj	...	Adjective
Adv	...	Adverb
Avz	...	Adverbializer
AR	...	Alter Reflexive
C	...	Concord
Cap	...	Capabilitative
Cau	...	Causative
Cl	...	Classifier
Comp	...	Comparative
Comt	...	Completive
Cond	...	Conditional
Conj	...	Conjunctive
Cont	...	Continuous
CF	...	Citation Form
[D]	...	Donor
Dat	...	Dative
Dec	...	Decisive
Def	...	Definitive
Det	...	Determinative
DF	...	Distant Future
Emph	...	Emphatic
[Exac]	...	Executor
[Exp]	...	Experiencer
Fem	...	Feminine
Fut	...	Future
[G]	...	Goal
Hab	...	Habitual
Hum	...	Human
i	...	Intensifier
Imp	...	Imperative
Impl	...	Implicative
Inst	...	Instrumental
Int	...	Interrogative
IF	...	Immediate Future

Loc	...	Locative
m	...	Modifier
Masc	...	Masculine
mov	...	Movement
n	...	Numeral
N	...	Noun
Neg	...	Negative
Nom	...	Nominative
NP	...	Noun Phrase
[P]	...	Place
Pa	...	Past
Per	...	Permissive
Pl/pl	...	Plural
Poss	...	Possessive
Pr	...	Present
Prob	...	Probabilitative
Pron	...	Pronoun
Rec	...	Reciprocal
RecP	...	Recent Past
Ref	...	Reflexive
RemP	...	Remote Past
Rep	...	Repetitive
Ret	...	Reportive
RD	...	Repetitive, Durative
S	...	Sentence
[S]	...	Source
Sg/sg	...	Singular
t	...	Tense Marker
T	...	Time-neutral
[T]	...	Time
[T-bég]	...	Time-beginning
[T-end]	...	Time-end
temp	...	Temporal
V	...	Verb
Vz	...	Verbilizer
VC	...	Verb Complex
VP	...	Verb Phrase
V(C) ₀	...	Ambient Verb (Complex)
V(C) ₁	...	Intransitive Verb (Complex)
V(C) ₂	...	Transitive Verb (Complex)

V(C) ₃	...	Recipient Transitive Verb (Complex)
(1)	...	First Person
(2)	...	Second Person
(3)	...	Third Person

INTRODUCTION

Arunachal Pradesh, the land of the Dawn Mountains, is the North-Eastern tip of India, comprising five mountainous districts totaling 83,578 square kilometers. Formerly known as the North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA) it was ushered in as a full-fledged Union Territory in the Indian Union in 1975 and forms our international border with Bhutan, China and Burma. It is inhabited by 467,511 people living in some 2,500 villages (Census, 1971). The population is composed of a large number of tribes speaking some fifty different languages. The whole area is covered with the offshoots of the Eastern Himalayas with the exception of the long and narrow alluvial valley of the Brahmaputra at the foothills.

Lohit, with an area of 29,427 square kilometers is the largest district in Arunachal Pradesh and is named after the principal river which flows through it. The topography of the district is a continuous chain of mountains ranging in altitude from 500' to 17,172' save the lower belts. The total population is 62,865 living in altogether 424 villages. The district is the home land of the Mishmi, Padam, Khamti, Singpho, Zakhring and Meyer tribes besides some

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expatriate Deori and Nepali refugees. There are 69 schools and adult education centers catering to 4,976 students*. English is the State language, first language and the medium of instruction. Recently, however, the administration has accepted, in principle, both Hindi and English as State languages. The schools are patterned on the Central School system.

Major languages in this district are Mishmi spoken by nearly 22,561 people and Khamti, a Tai-Chinese language (Census, 1971). Mishmi has three principal dialects: Idu spoken in the Dibang valley and Digaru and Miju spoken in the Lohit valley.

(NOTE: Subsequently, during the reorganization of districts in 1981, Dibang valley was carved out of Lohit as a new district).

Mishmi belongs to the 'Tibeto-Burman' family of languages. This family, considered by many to be a branch of a larger Sino-Tibetan family, is, in terms of number of languages, the largest of any spoken in South Asia. These languages cover a vast territory ranging from Jammu and Kashmir in the West to Assam, Indo-

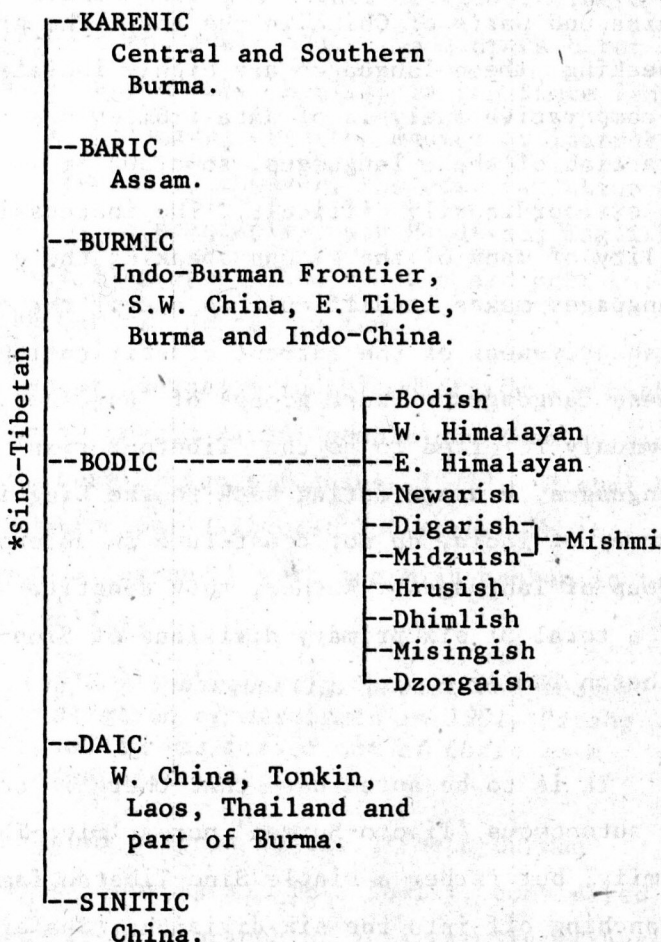
*Courtesy of Mr. Zakharia, Dist. Statistical Officer and Ms. Dici Mihi, Dist. Information and Public Relations Officer, Tezu.

China and parts of China in the east. The groups speaking these languages are highly isolated. A comparative analysis of data from even a fraction of these languages, some 300 in number, is extraordinarily difficult. The inaccessibility of many of the groups speaking these languages makes it difficult to accept the comprehensiveness of the current classification of these languages. These groups of languages commonly referred to as the 'Tibeto-Burman' languages, a usage dating back to the Linguistic Survey of India, do not constitute an autonomous group of languages. Rather, they constitute two of a total of six primary divisions of Sino-Tibetan family.

It is to be noted here that there is neither an autonomous 'Tibeto-Burman' nor a 'Sino-Thai' family, but rather a single Sino-Tibetan family branching off into the six divisions (Shafer, 1955). Three of these divisions have representatives in India, viz., Baric, Burmic and Bodic.

The Bodic division of Sino-Tibetan family is very complex. Shafer posits eleven sections of this division. Two of these sections would fall under a single sub-division, Mishmi, of which these form dialects.

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The significant features of these languages are the subject-object-verb (SOV) word order, the extensive use of tones to convey lexical information and the use of 'auxilliary' words to express syntactic relationships.

Nothing much has been written either in or

*Shapiro and Schiffman (Sept., 1975).

about Mishmi. The most extensive work appears to be those of Grierson and Robinson. Recently, 'A Phrase Book in Idu' was published by the Arunachal Administration.

The present work is based on the data collected in two field trips during the winters of 1975 and 1976 in Tezu and Tafrogam from the Digaru dialect. The informants were Mr. Bramting So Tayang, Ms. Bimla Chai and Ms. Aruna Basumatari. The data on the Miju and the Idu dialects for the purposes of verification and cross-checking were provided by Mr. Lachab So Krong and Ms. Dici Mihu. An informant profile is given below:

Bramting So Tayang: He is the cultural and social organizer of the Arunachal administration at Tafrogam-Korliang Agricultural Project. He is twentyfive years old and finished High School. He also knows Assamese, Hindi and English.

Bimla Chai: A housewife from the Hayuliang area, she is thirty years old and is a High School dropout. She is bilingual in Assamese.

Aruna Basumatari: She is an eighteen year old school girl from Tezu. She knows Assamese, Bengali, Hindi and English besides her mother tongue.

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Lachab So Krong: He is a twelve year old school boy from Hayuliang. He belongs to the Miju group of the Mishmis and knows English besides his mother tongue.

Dici Mihu: A twentyeight year old Idu from Anini valley. She is the District Information and Public Relations Officer in Lohit District Administration. She took her M.A. in Political Science from Banaras Hindu University. She speaks English, German, Bengali, Assamese, Hindi and French besides her mother tongue.

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