

Garo Morphology: A Descriptive Analysis

ABSTRACT

Angela R. Wa-tre Ingty



**Department of English
North-Eastern Hill University
Tura Campus
Tura 794 002**

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ABSTRACT

GARO MORPHOLOGY: A DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS

This thesis is an attempt at a Morphological description of the Garo Language. It is a Descriptive Analysis of the language.

Garo is a language spoken by people living in the Garo Hills in the western part of Meghalaya, mainly in the three districts of East Garo Hills, West Garo Hills and South Garo Hills. Its speakers are however also found in some districts of Assam, adjacent to Meghalaya namely, Kamrup and Goalpara as well as in distant places, such as Nowgong, Sibsagar, Dibrugarh and Karbi Anglong. They are also found in other parts of North East India, as well as the northern part of West Bengal, stretching from Koch Bihar and Jalpaiguri in the west and going on to Bangladesh in the south-east and south. Their main home however is the Garo Hills.

Garo belongs to the Bodo group in the Tibeto-Burman family of languages, which in turn is one of the two main branches of the Sino-Tibetan or Tibeto –Chinese Speech Family.¹

The history of the arrival of the mongoloid groups of people into India is not known, but it is supposed to be as old as that of the Aryans in the west,

¹ Grierson, G.A., *Linguistic Survey of India*, Vol. III, Part II, p. 68.

during some period before 1000 B.C. There are interesting traditions prevalent among the various tribes recounting the story of their migration. They trace their origin from the Tibeto-Burman race of the Tibeto-Chinese family of North West China, the area that lies between the upper waters of the Yang-tse-kiang and the Hwang-ho.²

The Bodos once formed a predominant section in the population of the North Eastern region and had even established powerful kingdoms, till they were superceded by other races. According to the scholars P.C. Bhattacharya and Robbins Burling, Garo and Bodo separated from each other about 2000 years ago from an ancestral common language. This was found out by a glotto lexical statistic or glotto chronological count of Bodo and Garo.³ The other languages belonging to this group are –Bara Kachari, Dimasa, Rabha, Koch, Mech, Lalung, Reang, Tripuri, Hajong, Hojai, Chutia and Deori. The tribes speaking these languages are found in the banks of the Brahmaputra valley, namely, Lakhimpur, Darrang, Kamrup, Goalpara, Cachar as well as in other districts in the states of Assam, Nagaland, Manipur and Tripura. They are also found in the Northern parts of Bengal and in the Mymensingh, Noakhali and Chittagong areas of Bangladesh.

² Grierson, *Linguistic Survey of India*, Vol. III, Part I, p.40.

³ Bhattacharya, Pramode Chandra *A Descriptive Analysis of the Boro Language*, Gauhati University Publication, 1977, p.10.

The Language

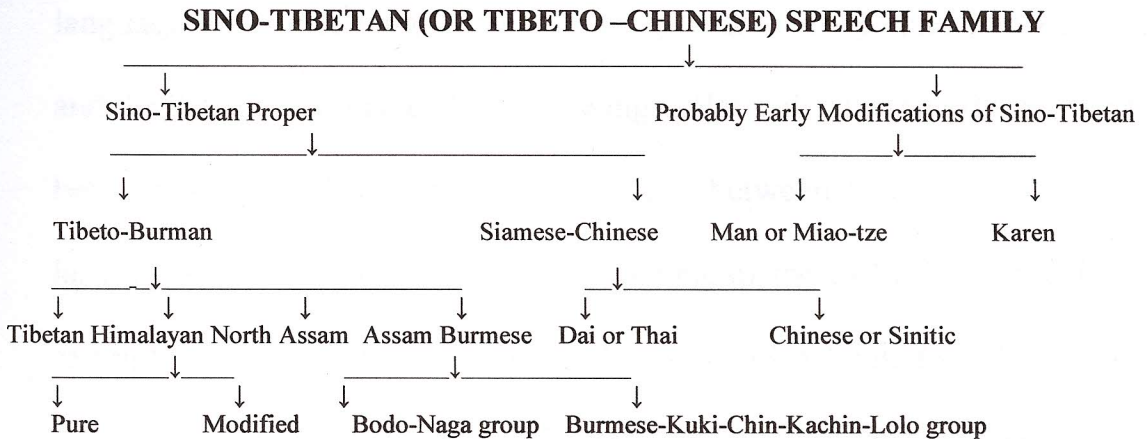
The Garos call their own language *A·chikku* or *A·chik Ku·sik*, that is, ‘the *A·chik* language’ which means ‘the language of hill men’. They also call it *Mande Ku·sik* ‘the language of men’.⁴ The term ‘Garo’ was given to them by other communities who came across them, but the people themselves use the terms *A·chik* or *Mande*.

Garo is predominantly a verb final language, so that the order of words in Garo is generally SOV, namely, Subject Object Verb. The morphology of the Garo language is predominantly agglutinative, though there are features of inflection as well. Garo has a large number of affixes which show grammatical relationships. There are both suffixes and prefixes, but a larger number of suffixes. There are many forms of compound words and it is also enriched with many loan words taken mainly from Indic sources, but a large number of English words are being added everyday, with the growth of education and consequent modernization. New words are being coined as well, with the growth of ideas and awareness of other communities, and of life in general in the world around them.

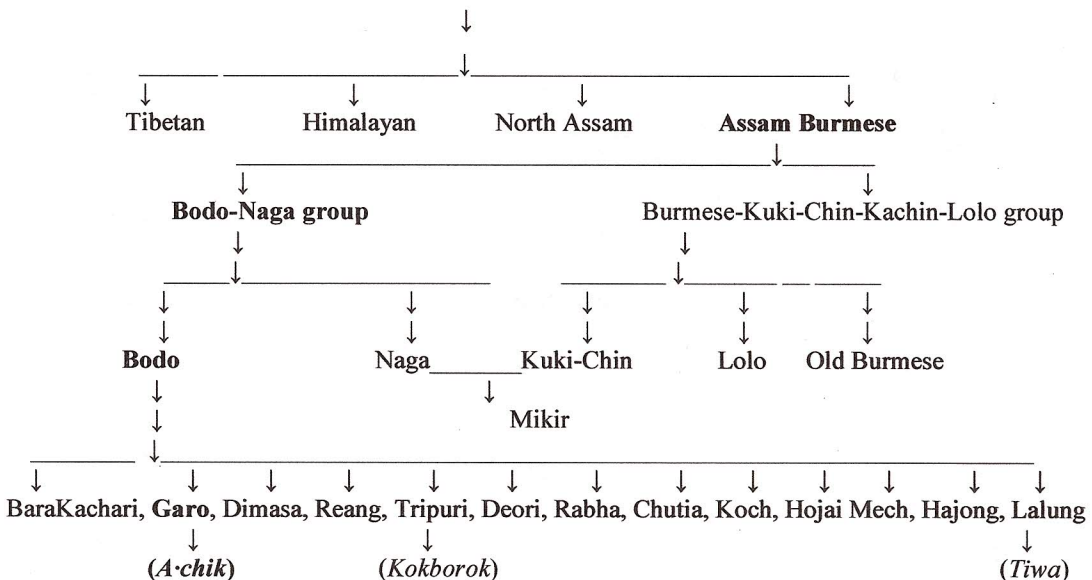
⁴ Sangma, M. S, *History of Garo Literature*, p.8.

The table below illustrates the place of Bodo and consequently of Garo, in the Sino-Tibetan language family:⁵

TABLE 1



Tibeto-Burman (continued)



⁵Chatterjee, S.K. Classification of the Tibeto-Burman Language according to Chatterjee, in his book *Kirata Janakriti* p.25

In establishing the place of Garo in the Tibeto-Burman Family of Languages, several writers have traced some similarities between the Garo language and other languages belonging to this group, and between Garo and the Tibetan language. The following tables will illustrate the similarities between Garo and Tibetan (Table 1) and between Garo and some other languages in the Bodo Group (Table 3). One of the earliest and best known examples is that given by Major A. Playfair in his book *The Garos* on the similarity between Garo and the Tibetan Language, as illustrated below:⁶

TABLE 2

<u>English</u>	<u>Thibetan</u>	<u>Garo</u>
Boar	phak-pa	wak bipha
Die	shi-wa	sia
Eye	mik	mikron
Hill	ri	a·bri
Head	go	sko

⁶ Playfair, Major A. *The Garos*, APPENDIX E, Published by Spectrum Publications, Guwahati, 2nd reprint, 1998, p. 165.

The following table illustrates the similarity between Garo and other languages in the Bodo group.

TABLE 3
Word Comparison between Garo and other languages of the Bodo Group

English	Garo	Bodo	Rabha	Koch
one	sa	se	Sa	(go)sa
two	gni	noi/nwi	ning	(ing)ning
three	gittam	tham	thatham	attam/tham
fish	na·tok	na	na	na
bird	do·o	daw	to	tochak
house	nok	no	nok	nok/nɪgw
tree	bol / (bi)pang	piphang	pang	fang/fan
fruit	bite	phithay	te	thwi
land/earth	a·a/ha·a	ha	ha	ha
rice/paddy	mi	mai	mai	mai
eye	mikron	megon	meken	məkər
face	mikhang	mokhang	nwkhang	mahang
I	anga	an	ang	ang
my	angni	anni	angi	angni / əni

Dialects:

The Garos living in different parts of the North Eastern region had very little contact with each other in the early days. As a result of this isolation, several dialects and cultural traits evolved which bore strong resemblances to each other and are easily understood by a Garo speaker, but

are not so easily recognized by a non-Garo, not familiar with the language. Some of the dialects of the language named by the earlier historians and scholars, such as G.A. Grierson, Major Playfair and Dr. M. S. Sangma are *A·we, Am·beng, Chibok, Chisak, Dual, Gara Ganching, Matchi, Atong, Ruga, Me·gam and Matabeng or Matjangchi.*⁷

A brief outline of the Phonetic and Phonological features of Garo:⁸

In the observation of this present scholar, Garo language has 29 phonemes, of which 18 are consonants, 6 vowels, and there are at least 5 diphthongs if not more.

A chart showing the phonemic inventory of Garo consonants in a table below will illustrate it more clearly:

⁷ Grierson, G. A. *Linguistic Survey of India*, Vol. III, Part I, Major Playfair *The Garos*, and Dr M. S. Sangma, *History of Garo Literature*

⁸ Taken from the scholar's own M.Phil thesis on A Phonetic and phonological analysis of the Garo Dialect, Madras Christian College, Tambaram, 1984.

Table IV

Manner of Articulation	Place of Articulation						
	Bilabial v- v+	Labio-dental v- v+	Denti-alveolar v- v+	Alveolar v- v+	Palatal v- v+	Velar v- v+	Glottal v- v+
Plosive	p ^h b		t ^h ḍ			k ^h g	ʔ
Affricate					c ʃ		
Nasal	m			n		ŋ	
Lateral				l			
Tap				ɾ			
Fricative				s			h
Semi-vowel	w				j		

There are six sounds in the language which may be described as pure vowel phonemes: i) - Front vowels, / i / and / e /, ii) - Central vowel / a / and / ɨ /, iii)- Back vowels / o / and / u /.

The table below will illustrate it more clearly:

Table V

Level of Raising	Part of Front	the tongue Central	raised Back
Between half-close and close position	i	ɨ	u
Between half-open and half-closed position	e		o
Between half-open and open position		a	

Diphthongs:

Sequences of two or more vowels occur very frequently in Garo. In fact, any two vowels may occur together, or the same vowels may be repeated. However, in his book, *A Garo Grammar*, Robbins Burling describes the difficulty of analyzing these vowel sequences, because they occur in sequences of not only two or three, but even four at times,⁹ such as *ahaua* or *ahaia* and *aiao* so that it is sometimes difficult to decide whether they comprise one or more syllables. The following however, may be clearly defined as diphthongs in the Garo language:

/ai/ as in *ai* /ai/ 'mother'

/au/ as in *aua* /au-^wa/ 'to bathe'

/ao/ as in *aoa* /ao-^wa/ 'that one, over there'

/eu/ as in *neua* /neu-^wa/ 'to peep or look in while passing'

/oi/ or /oe/ as in *oi* or *oe* /oi/ 'hey you!'

GARO LITERATURE:

Garo Literature can be broadly classified into two sections, namely:

a) Traditional Oral Literature and b) Written Literature.

⁹ Robbins Burling, *A Garo Grammar* Deccan College Monograph Series: 25. Published by Deccan College Post Graduate and Research Institute, Poona. pp, 5-6.

Oral Tradition:

Garo has a rich oral tradition full of proverbs, idioms, oral narratives of folk tales and traditional poetry in songs and rhymes. Much of the history of the Garo people, as well as their religious and cultural codes is contained in its oral literature handed down through the ages from generation to generation.

Written Literature:

Garo was first put into writing only when the British officers came to the Garo Hills. The Missionaries who came soon after also took up the task of putting down the language in writing dictionaries and translations of the Bible.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

As a student of English literature and language, the study of the sounds of language and the formation of words has always been of particular interest to the present scholar. After attending the Summer Institute in English organized by the Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages (CIEFL), Shillong Regional Centre, in the year 1977 and being introduced to the study of phonetics for the first time, an interest was kindled by all the

new insights gained and by the enormous scope evident in such a study for linguistic investigation into the scholar's own language. Later, the scholar registered for M.Phil studies at the Madras Christian College, Tambaram (Autonomous) and did her research on "A Phonetic and Phonological Analysis of the Garo Language". The present work is a continuation of the research into the scholar's own Language, but where the focus has shifted to Morphology.

A more important objective for undertaking this study is that very little effort has been made to make a proper morphological analysis of the language. Though there have been a few studies made, especially in the course of writing books on Grammar and Vocabulary, these were not linguistically analysed and hence a deep felt need to undertake a more detailed analysis of the language. Very few native speakers have also made an effort to describe their own language from this aspect. The scholar attempts to fill in this gap, a very important branch of Linguistic study of Garo.

A third objective is to know the place of the Garo Language within the community of the Tibeto-Burman speakers from the morphological point of view.

METHODOLOGY:

This thesis is an attempt to give a morphological analysis of the Garo Language. It will be mainly descriptive in nature and the data mostly self-generated was also collected and verified using natural and participatory survey of speakers of the language. The scholar has also made a study on all available work already done by other writers, though not much has been done. The data has also been cross-checked with other speakers of Standard Garo.

By natural survey is meant a personal observation of the way the language is used colloquially, that is in everyday conversation among the native speakers of the language. The scholar herself is a native speaker of the language, being an inhabitant of Tura, the district headquarter of the Garo Hills for several decades.

By participatory observation is meant the data collected through active participation in discussions on the language, with other native speakers of the language, in small as well as big groups such as in seminars, conferences and workshops. To gather further information as well as to clarify and confirm some doubts and uncertainties, frequent consultations have also been made with people who are well versed in the language and

knowledgeable about its Grammar, Vocabulary and other important aspects of the language

In order to achieve the aims and objectives of the present study, the scholar has undertaken, first a review of relevant books written on the topic; on Morphology in general, as well as on Garo Grammar in particular. On Garo Grammar, several books have been written by missionaries and native speakers as well. On the morphology of the language, hardly any work has been done, except by Robbins Burling, Professor Emeritus, University of Michigan, whose books on Garo language the scholar has found extremely helpful as a guide. This study however will be different from his works as it will concentrate mainly on, affixes in morphology and some word formation processes of the language.

To make a comparison with other related languages of the Bodo group under the Sino-Tibetan Family, the scholar has also made a list of words and collected words that are similar to those in the Garo language, and these have been included in a table and incorporated in the body of the thesis.

DELIMITATION:

This study is delimited to the analysis and description of the following morphological processes:

- 1) Affixes
- 2) Loan Words
- 3) Reduplication
- 4) Compound Words
- 5) Coined Words

The subject of analysis in this dissertation will be a practical study based more on the spoken than on the written form of language of the educated Garos who have a sufficient degree of education and whose colloquial speech has a high degree of mutual intelligibility. The language as described above is largely spoken by the educated speakers of Garo who live in Tura and other district headquarters and towns of Garo hills which are important centres of learning, as well as in Shillong the state capital. The present scholar herself is a native speaker of the language and much of her own idiolect has been studied in this dissertation.

As the standard dialect of Garos is selected for this study. It will be done on the basis of mutual intelligibility rather than on the basis of



geographical boundaries. *A·we* and not the other dialects has been chosen for this study because it is accepted as the standard form of the language and as the standard dialect, *A·we* has written literature. It has text books right from the Primary school stage. Readers, Primers, poems, novels and even the Bible are written in this dialect.

Review of Related Literature on the Garo Language: This being a new field of study with regard to the Garo language, very little adequate material is available. The scholar has therefore relied on whatever could be collected from books on the culture, history, language and literature of the Garos; also some Dictionaries and Grammar and school books written by the earlier missionaries and scholars.

Very few good books have been written on the Grammar of the Garo language. There were earlier writings on the Grammar and vocabulary of the language, as well as dictionaries written by some British Officers, also by American Baptist Missionaries. However, there are very few which can be described as satisfactory descriptions of the language, and none of them, with the exception of one, would meet the expected standard of present day linguistic studies. Some valuable work in this area, namely, writings on Garo Grammar and particularly the Morphology of the language have just recently

been done by Robbins Burling, Professor Emeritus of Anthropology and Linguistics at the University of Michigan, USA, who has written various books, some of which are: *A Garo Grammar*¹⁰ and the *Language of the Modhupur Mandi (Garo) Vol. I: Grammar*.¹¹

There are five chapters in the thesis, they are as follows:

Chapter one is an introductory chapter which introduces the land and the people. It also indicates its language family as belonging to the Bodo group of families and gives some characteristic features of the language. It also gives the Objectives of the study, the Delimitations and the Methodology. A Review of the Related Literature of the Garo Language is also given in this chapter.

Chapter two discusses the inflections in the Garo language but starts with a brief definition of morphology, morphemes, affixation and other morphological terms relevant for the study. It then goes into a detailed description and analysis of the features of inflection in the Garo Language, particularly of the Verbs, Adverbs, Adjectives, Nouns and Pronouns which undergo inflection in various ways.

¹⁰ Burling, Robbins *A Garo Grammar*. Deccan College Monograph Series: 25. Published by Deccan College Post Graduate and Research Institute, Poona.

¹¹ Burling, Robbins, *The Language of the Modhupuri Mandi (Garo)*. Vol. I.: Grammar. Bibliophile South Asia in association with Promilla & co., Publishers.

Chapter three discusses the Derivations in the Garo Language and goes on to describe in detail the Nominalizing Suffixes, the Adjectives and especially the Adverbs which show derivational characteristics. The Numeral morphemes of the Garo language which show a lot of similarities with other languages of the Tibeto-Burman group is also described in some detail. It also gives a brief account of some of the Morphophonemic features of the Garo language.

Chapter four discusses other word formation processes in the Garo language discussing in detail features of Reduplication, Compounds, Hybrids, Blended words, Elided Words, Loan Words and Coined words, which are some of the many ways by which the Garo language continues to develop in the present day. All these also show that Garo though an ancient language, has a vast and rich vocabulary and is a living, dynamic language and developing language even today.

The fifth and concluding chapter gives an account of the findings in the study undertaken. Certain important findings and insights gained in the study were given as follows:

Through a detailed analysis of the language, the scholar has attained a better understanding of how the language functions morphologically.

It was observed that there were many features in common with other languages of the Bodo group, namely, similarities in word structure, in

inflection and derivation and in the structure of the verbs, the features of reduplication and the natural gender, all showing an affinity to other languages of the great Bodo family. Therefore, the objective to know the place of the Garo Language within the community of the Tibeto-Burman speakers from the morphological point of view has been achieved to a certain extent.

Though a few good books have been written on the Grammar of the Garo language, most of these were not fully analyzed linguistically, with the exception of one by Robbins Burling, Professor Emeritus of Anthropology and Linguistics at the University of Michigan, U. S. A. There was therefore a deep felt need to undertake a more detailed analysis of the language. It is hoped that this study will make a small contribution to the effort and will lead to further research in the future.

It has been found that Garo is an affixing language and that it has a large number of affixes of which suffixes rather than prefixes occur in greater numbers, and the roots are mainly monosyllabic. These suffixes occur in a linear sequence and often many morphemes follow a word in a concatenating sequence, proving the surmise that Garo is a 'suffixing language'. Also that it has a large number of inflections as well as derivations, and the structure and function of its inflectional and derivational morphemes are all very systematic. Certain outstanding aspects of different inflectional and derivational features were highlighted, such as, of Verbs, Nouns, Pronouns, Adverbs, Adjectives and of Classifiers in Numeral Morphemes. Also features of Reduplication, Compounding, Coinage and Loan words.

The following suggestions were then made:

There was an urgent need to write new Grammar books as the present trends in Linguistics had made the older ones obsolete and inadequate. There is a need for an in-depth and complete linguistic analysis of Garo, so that revised Grammar books based on research findings could be made to meet the need of the day. Though the scholar herself has attained a better understanding of how the language functions through a detailed analysis of the language, she does not claim that the findings are a final and absolute description and further research has to be undertaken in future.

There is also a need for further research on almost every aspect of Garo Morphology for which there is still plenty of scope. There is much material for further research, and this being the case, a description of the language under survey will not be complete until further and deeper research is carried on in the future by other scholars.

Garo has a rich heritage of oral literature which should also be properly recorded and preserved for future generations. This is very urgent as much is already being lost with the fast pace of modernization that is taking place in the community today.

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