

Language acquisition of Boro: A typological approach

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Abstract

The Boro language possesses some peculiar typological features in special regards to kids. It differs from normal morphological and syntactical nature of the language. It is unique having its own set of vocabularies, articulation system and grammatical structure; and is always used by and for the children. But there elderly people of the society widely involve and help the kids to be acquainted with those language mechanisms, skills and properties as well in their early age. Such language phenomenon occurred in the language have not received any linguistic approach yet though language is gaining momentum a lot in the field of linguistics. The language used by the kids is very unique and traditionally transmitted but have remained fresh being untouched subject over the century. Therefore this paper tries to provide a theoretical linguistic approach to it and let the world know about the languages' most interesting feature, fact and peculiarity. Moreover, this study as it bears a deep linguistic significance in the typology of the language will also open a new avenue to the languages of the world which are lagging in this respect.

Keywords: Boro kids, lexical composition, articulation, typology, morphology and syntax

1. Introduction

Boro language is a language of North-East India mainly spoken in the state Assam and its adjacent state mainly in border areas. It is a language of Tibeto-Burman group of Sino-Tibetan speech family. In the first decade of 21st century in the year 2003 this language gained its scheduled status of the Indian constitution. Typologically this language is characterized with high agglutination. In this language kids ranging from one to three years of age constitute a sizable number of vocabularies which are unique in nature. At the very initial stage of learning language of kids elderly members of family or society start talking with them using some words having easy articulation which are not generally used by the elders when they talk to each other. It is the capacity of the language that provides opportunity to kids to learn the language with some bundle of words with easy utterance in their early stage of language acquisition. In fact, the language has alternatives for some difficult words for kids. The kids in their learning stage learn the language with those alternatives easily and gain the way of acquiring the language. If such alternatives would not have existed in the system of this language there might have been difficulties in learning language for a child. Probably, acquisition of the language for kids would have taken more time compared to the amount of time that they spend today in acquiring the same. Children like to prefer those words only because of easiness of articulation. Their immature speech organs cannot utter the words as elderly people do. They keep using those words until they become fluent in speaking the language. When they grow up; their speech organs develop; and they gradually begin to pronounce the words like elder people and start giving up those words which they used in their early stage. Child language with its peculiar set of lexical items, grammar and articulation system sets Boro language as a language of peculiar typology.

2. Aims of the study

The study aims at focusing on the linguistic features exhibited by kids in the typology of Boro language. The lexis or discourse that the Boro kids use in their language learning stage is of peculiar typology which generally differs from normal typology of the language both in nature and structure. That peculiarity of the language can be observed only in some points of morphological and syntactical structure. Here, what is to be studied has a deep linguistic significance for the following two purposes as the study

1. Tends to document the language providing typological analysis of the language in special regards to infants.
2. Targets to bring the hidden facts of the language to the forefront.

3. Methodology

In going to study the child language of Boro from typological view point no any other writings related to this similar case from any linguistic study of the globe is found as its review article. The methodology used for the study is purely personal observation. As the author one of the native speakers of the language the study seems to be easy to him. Of course, for broad discussion on the topic in gathering the data attention is paid towards the interaction of children who are on their way to gain the language by listening to others. Wherever, whenever and whoever (native speakers) the author met in his locality tried to encounter them face to face to get more knowledgeable about the subject matter. Therefore, it is a purely and primarily data based study, where deep personal observation and interaction is done from very practical way. Besides, telephonic conversation is also made to clarify the dialectical differences of data.

4. Major points to be studied

Typology of child language which is considered to be of peculiar nature in the typology of Boro language can easily be noticed in morphological and syntactical or sometime

phonological domain when one goes through discourses used by infants in the language. Here, for the convenience of the study discussion is made on some major points which are as follows:

- Word typology
- Reduplication
- Articulation system
- Syntactic pattern

4.1 Word Typology: As the infants are at their very early stage of their life the world where human beings are peopled is very new and inexperienced to them. At this stage many situations they face is challenging. But they continue their effort to be well acquainted with those situations where they live especially gaining knowledge of every aspect of their life. Due to their immature mental and physical growth, they find out easy methods in their way in doing many things what they

desire. In this way, Boro language can be considered to have that capacity of easiness as the language provides bundle of words of easy articulation to the kids in acquiring the language easily and smoothly. Such words provided by the language to the kids are easy to be discussed classifying into three distinct word types i.e. noun, verb and adjective. These are discussed below.

4.1.1 Noun: The noun words that the Boro kids use are quite different from commonly used words of the language. These are found both in monosyllabic and disyllabic forms. Such words not only differ in size and structure but also in nature from the normal phenomenon of the language. The variation between specifically used words for kids and commonly used words of the language is shown along with their meaning by the following tabular.

Table 1: Noun words used by kids

Syllabification	Childish word	Common words	Meaning
Monosyllabic words	gɔ	duɟi	Water
	haɔ	ɔr	Fire
	t ^h ai	p ^h it ^h ai	Fruit
	mam	uŋk ^h am	Rice
	maɔ	maɔzi	Cat
	mɔ	muɟsuɔ	Cow
	me	buɟrma	Goat
Disyllabic words	zeze	muɟila	Mess
	gɔgɔ	daɔ	Foul
	gaga	sek ^h a	Knife/cutter
	dudu	abu/ahar	Boobs/milk
	nunu	huɟɔa at ^h uɟn	Male organ
	dɔdɔ	bedɔr	Meat
	buɟbuɟ	emp ^h uɟ	Insect
	t ^h at ^h ai	p ^h it ^h ai/met ^h ai/k ^h aza	sweet items

Both the monosyllabic and disyllabic noun words found used in the infant stage are almost equal in number. Here points to be noted that the monosyllabic words like- *maɔ*, *mɔ*, *me* which are used by the kids to denote the animals like cat, cow and goat respectively have resemblance to onomatopoeic sounds of those respective animals. In fact, animal denoting words of the kids can easily be considered to have been picked up from the onomatopoeic source of the language as such words are easy to be uttered for having single syllable. In case of disyllabic words it is also worth discussing that the noun which is formed by combining two syllables follows some rules in its construction. To clarify the statement any one disyllabic noun word from the above tabular can be taken as an example. If one observes deeply on the syllabic structure of those words it is noticeable that the syllable started with voiced or voiceless phoneme be it anything restarts the second syllable with the same phoneme started the first syllable of the word with. It is also interesting to note that the entire monosyllabic and disyllabic noun words found used by the kids in their infant stage are always started with consonant phoneme only.

4.1.2 Verb: In comparison to other class of words verbs are largely used by kids as it becomes possible for them to express

their thought, emotion, desire etc. only through the verb. Whatever they need to do they happen to use verb in every step of their life. But in most of the times to express their ideas and thoughts they use phrasal verbs which are unique and different from phrasal verbs found in other languages of the world. The phrasal verb used by the Boro kids is composed of two different components. The initial component of the phrase is regular verb of different forms and meanings and the final component is the word *hun*, In Boro the word *hun* is also a regular verb whose general meaning is 'to say'. But in case of child language it is used in another meaning. The meaning of that word expressed in the child language is 'to do'. Here, it is used as supportive word to express the function of the initial verb in the phrase. Among the two components of the verb phrase the initial verb changes its form to show different meanings of different contexts of the phrasal verb. But the final verb is always static; never changes its form even if it is used with different words in different situations to express different meanings of the phrase. Thus, the word *hun* always needs to be accompanied with those regular verbs at any time at any place to represent the complete sense of the phrase. The phrasal verbs formed by such process abundantly found in the language are as follows-

Table 2

Verb	Meaning	Verb	Meaning
ham huɲ	to eat	zaɔ huɲ	to fling
du huɲ	to sleep	zem huɲ	to fry
gɔ huɲ	to drink	haɔp ^h a huɲ	to bath
dum huɲ	to beat	d ^h ɔm huɲ	to explode
be huɲ	to inject	ɔ huɲ	to vomit
p ^h es huɲ	to gore	e huɲ	to pass stool
beŋ huɲ	to fart	nem huɲ	to peel off
adi/aidi huɲ	to pain	susu huɲ	to pee
dudum huɲ	to fall down	agaɔ huɲ	to dance

In case of verb it is also important to mention here that apart from the above mentioned verbs some daily used verbs (independent in nature) of the language are also used by and for the kids along with the word *huɲ* in the same way as in the above examples. For examples- za huɲ (to eat), bu huɲ (to beat), etc.

4.1.3 Adjective: In the child language no adjective words of separate entity is used. What is found to be used as adjective words by kids in acquiring the language is none other than slightly transformed form of elderly used words. The transformation takes place in first syllable of adjective words which generally start with /g/ and /m/ phonemes. A few specimens are given below:

Table 3

Common Adjective	Adjective used by kids	Meaning
gʷt ^h ɔ	ʷt ^h ɔ	delicious
gʷdʷi	ʷdʷi	sweet
gʷmʷɲ	ʷmʷɲ	ripe
gʷɔɔn	ʷɔɔn	new
gʷzʷɔ	ʷzʷɔ	high
gʷzʷɲ	ʷzʷɲ	shiny
mʷzʷɲ	ʷzʷɲ	good
gusu	usu	cold
gudʷɲ	udʷɲ	hot

In these examples, one more noticeable point is that during the transformation of adjective words the consonant phonemes which started with first syllable of the word are automatically dropped keeping the remaining phonemic sequence of the word intact. Thus, such adjectives are used being transformed into shorter and easier form to get the easier articulation of the word for the kids.

4.2 Reduplication: Reduplication is also taking place in child language especially in using verb words. It is previously said that Boro kids use some verb phrase in their language learning stage. If one goes through the kids' language it will be only reduplication is seen taken place only in verbs used by them. The initial word unit of the verb phrase is reduplicated for a meaningful discourse in their language. But never the final unit of the phrase is seen reduplicated. Sometime some elderly used common words are also reduplicated by kids in many contexts whenever and wherever they feel necessary. The

reduplication found to be used in very initial stage of language acquisition can be determined by the following sentences.

- Example 1: Gɔsa gan gan huɲ
Shirt wear wear do (VP) (put on shirt)
- Example 2: Nuɲ za za huɲ
2SG eat eat do (VP) (you eat)
- Example 3: Nuɲ-k^hʷɔ haɔ k^ham k^ham huɲ-guɲ
2SG ACC fire burn burn do (VP) FUT (fire will burn you)

[Here in the examples the word *huɲ* is a final word unit of the verb phrase that always to be accompanied with verb of all kinds and it is specifically used only in the language of kids] Reduplication taking place in the language of kids limits itself to the words of verb class only and such reduplication is always found in the form of complete reduplication.

4.3 Articulation system: Because of immature speech organs children get obstacle in their way of producing some sound when they speak. Therefore, they always look forward for easy way to utter the sound with easy articulation. Boro language has a capacity of such easy articulation that kids immensely prefer in their utterance. There are a few articulation systems with special regards to kids which have been being traditionally practiced since the time immemorial in the language. These are discussed below:

1. In a word if trill sound /r/ is present anywhere either in initial or middle or final position of the word it is always replaced by the lateral sound /l/ and the word is articulated being inserted /l/ phoneme in lieu of /r/ consonant phoneme. For example:

Table 4

Position	Common word	Childish word	Meaning
Initial:	ruɲa	luɲa	axe
	raga	laga	anger
Middle:	sereb	seleb	homemade whisky
	bere	bele	hornet
Final	bibar	bibal	flower
	gup ^h ur	gup ^h ul	white, etc

2. No consonant cluster is used in the child language. If the children happen to use some words having consonant cluster in their interaction use those words removing the cluster from them. But the first phoneme of the consonant cluster of the word is always kept intact whereas the final

phoneme of the same cluster is always dropped from the word. There are good numbers of clustered words in the

language which become cluster less when getting used by the kids. For specimen some words are listed in below:

Table 5

Common word	Childish word	Meaning
Dropping of /l/ sound:		
gɔsla	gɔsa	shirt
sik ^h la	sik ^h a	damsel
p ^h agla	p ^h aga	mad
k ^h amp ^h lai	k ^h amp ^h ai	wooden tool
bazlɔ	bazɔ	to spring
danp ^h le	danp ^h le	to cut into pieces
Dropping of /r/ sound		
k ^h an ^h k ^h rai	k ^h an ^h k ^h ai	crab
k ^h ansri	k ^h ansi	earth worm
buɣigri	buɣigi/ buɣgi	jujube
gunrai	gungai	mucus
muɣk ^h ra	muɣk ^h a	monkey

3. Sometime children in their way of utterance of word utter only half of the word (words used by elderly people) and express the meaning as it is of that word. In this way, the words which are partially uttered by kids generally consist of two syllables each. Among the two syllables of each word in most of the time only the final syllable of the word is uttered and used as their specific words. But though it is so the final syllable sometime transforms its form slightly for suitability of articulation during utterance. The words of that kind are given below:

Table 6

Eldely used words		uttered by kids	meaning
un-du	>	du	to sleep
p ^h i-t ^h ai	>	t ^h ai	fruit
uɣ-k ^h am	>	mam	rice
ha-su	>	susu	to urine
em-p ^h uɔ	>	buɣbuɣɔ	Insect ^[1]

Furthermore, the final syllable of words which is used for and by the kids is sometime found to be used being reduplicated either in intact or slightly transformed form. Here the last two examples mentioned above are the good examples for the case.

4.4 Syntactic Pattern: Most of the Tibeto-Burman languages are verb ending languages and characterized with the word order of S-O-V pattern. The Boro language is also not exception in this regard as it belongs to the same language family of the TB (Tibeto-Burman) languages group. The simple sentence structure of Boro language is of S-O-V pattern as many languages of the world. ^[1] But a few exceptions are found in the level of discourses used by kids in the language where verb is found reduplicated one after another in a linear sequence of that normal S-O-V syntactic word order of the language. It is previously discussed that some verbs are found in reduplicated form in the language of kids in this language. The reduplication of the verb taken place in the kids' discourse may be up to four times one after another in a linear sequence of a sentence. That is why the

syntactic pattern of the language of kids can well be determined as S-O-V, S-O-V-V, S-O-V-V-V and S-O-V-V-V-V. These are illustrated with the examples given below:

- **S-O-V**
Aɣ mam za huɣn nuɣ
1SG rice eat do (VP) DEF.
[I want to eat rice]
- **S-O-V-V**
Nuɣn k^hamp^hai zɔ zɔ huɣn
2SG stool sit sit do (VP)
[You sit on the stool]
- **S-O-V-V-V**
Ada-a maɔ bu bu bu huɣn-bai
Brother. NOM beat beat beat do (VP) PFCT
[Brother has beaten the cat]
- **S-O-V-V-V-V**
Babu-a gɔsa guɖan gan gan gan huɣn-bai
Babu.NOM shirt new wear wear wear wear do (PV) PFCT
[Babu (kid) has worn new shirt]
[In the last example the reduplication pauses for a second after the first reduplication and restarts for another one eg. gan-gan gan-gan]

Here, in the examples mentioned above the word *huɣn* which is used after the reduplication of verb is a part of verb phrase. Whenever kids happen to use verb, the verb to be used by them is always accompanied with the word *huɣn*. Interestingly, this particular word *huɣn* is commonly used with all verbs used by kids. So, it is easy to be confirmed that the verb used in this way is none other than a Phrasal Verb.

5. Conclusion

The uniqueness of Boro language undoubtedly lies on the language used by kids in the language which is of peculiar typology with its own set of vocabulary, grammar and articulation system. And this peculiarity found in the child language sets the language as a language of peculiar typology. But it needs to be admitted that as the kids are in their very early stage the language used by them is not well organized and structured. Because of their immature early life sometime they deviate from traditional convention of articulation which has been practiced over the century. But again it remains static as the elderly people of the society keep involved generation

¹ Chainary, S.P. Tibeto-Burman Languages of North East India, First Published 2014. P.109

after generation in practicing that particular type of language with a view to provide language skills to the children. The linguistic features found in Boro language in special regards to kids can be summed up by the following concluding remarks-

1. Child language differs from normal typology of the language. Because, the child language grammatically and phonologically exhibits another peculiar language typology within the typology of its own language.
2. No consonant cluster is used by kids at all.
3. Words used by them are monosyllabic as well as disyllabic in structure.
4. All adjective words of the language which started with /g/ and /m/ phonemes are pronounced without articulating the starting phoneme of those words.
5. The trill sound /r/ phoneme is not easy to be articulated by kids. That is why when kids happen to utter the word having trill sound /r/ phoneme then they utter it replacing that trill sound /r/ phoneme by lateral sound /l/ phoneme in the word in all time
6. In the language of kids, the word *hyn* co-occurs with all verbs with a purpose of building phrasal verbs is another striking typological feature of the language.

6. Abbreviations and Symbols

TB. Tibeto-Burman

1SG. 1st person singular

2SG. 2nd person singular

NOM. Nominative

ACC. Accusative

PFCT. Present perfect

FUT. Future

VP. Verb Phrase

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