

Western Boro dialects in Nepal and northern West Bengal

Kazuyuki KIRYU

1. Introduction

Kiryu (2008) represents an outline of the Meche language in Nepal, including a grammar, a list of vocabulary and a text. Meche is a Tibeto-Burman language spoken in the Jhapa District of Nepal and belongs to the Boro-Garo subgroup of the Tibeto-Burman family. Meche is also known as Mech in India and it is usually considered to be the same language as Boro spoken in Assam. In Kiryu (2008), based on some data from northern West Bengal, he concludes that Meche is much more closely related to the varieties spoken in Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri Districts than to Boro in Assam. He calls the group of these varieties “the western Boro dialects” in contrast to “the eastern Boro dialects”, which are spoken in Assam. In this paper, I will discuss a comparative data between the western Boro dialects and the eastern Boro dialects in terms of morpho-phonetics and morpho-syntax, and give a further illustration for the two dialectal groups of Boro. I also take up some data that illustrate variations among the western Boro dialects.

1.1. The terms denoting the Boro dialects

Before starting the discussion outlined above, it is important to make clear confusing terms applied to the Boro varieties, especially the terms “Mech” and

“Meche”, “Bodo”, “Boḍo” and “Boro”, and “Kachari”. To do so, a brief historical summary on researches into the language is called for.

Currently, the term “Meche” is only used to designate the variety spoken in Eastern Nepal. This variety is also spoken across the border into West Bengal, India, but the group of people there is identified as Bodo nowadays. Saying “nowadays” implies that the Bodos inhabiting in northern West Bengal used to be differently called: they used to be called Mech. As I report in my 2008 booklet, the Bodos in West Bengal and the Meches in Nepal have close association with each other in terms of kinship. My main consultant has a lot of relatives in northern West Bengal, but not beyond the Sankosh River, the bordering river lying between the two states, West Bengal and Assam.

Endle (1911) is a descriptive study on the people called Kacharis. The Kacharis live in scattered places along the foothills of the Himalayas and the banks of Brahmaputra River in Assam. The Hindus call them Kachari in Kamrup and Darrang and Mech in Goalpara and northern West Bengal, although the self-denomination of both the tribes is Boro or Boḍo. Boro is used in Assam and Boḍo is used in northern West Bengal. Endle notes that Meches are the same as Kacharis in Darrang, but that the same race is known as

Mech “from the Manás river westwards to the neighborhood of Jalpaiguri”, and that they are numerous in Goalpara district (Endle 1911:82). In fact, Skrefsrud (1889) writes a grammar of the Mech language in Goalpara, where he notes they are the same as Bodo in Assam.

Hodgson (1880a, 1880b) has a description about the people and he is the first to use the term Bódó (i.e. Bodo). However, since he collected data from Meches living along the Mechi river (1880a:116), he uses the term “Mechi” in one of his earlier manuscripts, “Notes on the Mechis”, which is available at the British Library. The term “Mechi” is a Bengali/Nepali term, like the Nepali term “Meche”. Later in his 1880 books, however, he avoids the use of “Mechi” because “Mécch is a name imposed by strangers” (Hodgson 1880a: 72).¹ The language data accommodated in his book are actually taken from the western dialect of Boro. In contrast, the data presented in Skrefsrud (1889)--although the variety is identified as Mech--are much more similar to Boro in Assam. “Boḍo”, “Bodo” and “Boro” are also confusing. The self-denomination of the Kachari people in Assam is Boro [bɔɾɔ] while that in northern West Bengal and Nepal is Boḍo [bɔɖɔ].

In sum, I use the three terms differently: Meche refers to the variety spoken in Nepal, Boḍo refers to the variety spoken in northern West Bengal, which used to be referred to as Mech; and Boro refers to the variety spoken in Assam, which used to be referred to as Mech in Goalpara and as Kachari in Kamrup and Darrang. The term Bodo (without a dot under the d) is reserved as a generic term that refers to the Bodo people. The term Boro is also used to refer to the name of higher branches, both the one that embraces the three varieties and the higher sub-grouping including Dimasa, and Kokborok (a.k.a. Tripuri), etc. The hierarchical relationship among the languages is shown in Figure 1, which is based on Joseph and Burling (2006:1-2).

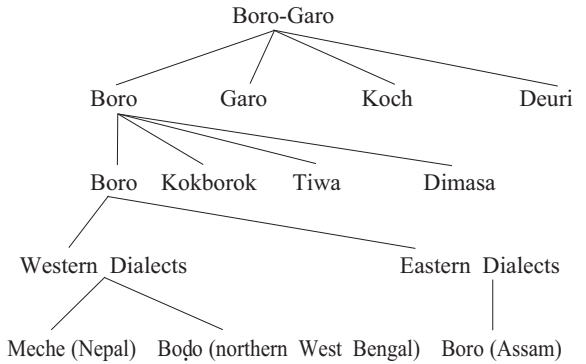


Figure 1: Boro-Garo Language Family

2. The division between the two Boro dialects

As shown in Figure 1, the internal division of the Boro language separates two dialects. One is the western dialect spoken in northern West Bengal and Nepal, and the other is the eastern dialect spoken in Assam, which is referred to by the term Boro. The Boro variety is well studied in Bhattacharya (1977), and may be further divided into four sub-dialects. Bhattacharya points out there are some phonological differences among the sub-dialects. No work on the western dialect of Boro has been done so far except the one by the current author. In Kiryu (2008), I point out that the phonological and morphological features in Meche and Boḍo are exactly the same, with some minor differences in vocabulary. Furthermore, I also point out that although Meche and Boro are mutually intelligible to a great extent, there are some differences in pronunciation and vocabulary. In what follows, I will discuss some characteristics that divide the Boro dialects into two major dialectal groups.

2.1 A comparison of Meche/Boḍo and Boro

Eastern Boro dialects are spoken in the State of Assam, and the Kokrajhar dialect is considered to be the standard. Boro is an official language of Assam and now the Bodos in Assam have an autonomous region called Bodoland. Education in Boro-medium is available from the primary to the tertiary levels, and publication

in Boro is very active.

Meche and Boḍo (MB) dialects are spoken in Nepal and the northern part of the State of West Bengal. They are linguistically the same with minor differences in vocabulary. Although they are mutually intelligible, they are different from Boro to some extent. Some differences between the two dialectal groups will be discussed as follows with respect to morpho-phonetics and morpho-syntax.

2.1.1 Morpho-phonetics

Meche in Nepal and Boḍo in West Bengal do not differ in phonology. Table 1 is the list of consonants in the two dialects.²

Compared to the MB dialects, Boro has fewer

consonants, as in Table 2.

Some of the consonants have allophones in both dialectal groups. The phonemic representations of the stops are based on the devanāgarī script. Although phonemically *ph*, *th*, *kh* may be represented as *p*, *t*, *k*, as some scholars do, I use *ph*, *th*, *kh* in the syllable initial position, and *p*, *t*, *k* in the syllable final position to represent the actual pronunciations.

2.1.1.1. The syllable structure

The syllable structures do not differ among the three dialects. It is schematically represented as in (1).

$$(1) \sigma = C_1 C_2 V C_3$$

The initial consonant position may be filled with a consonant except the glottal stop and the velar nasal.

Table 1: Consonants in Meche and Boḍo

	Bilabial	Dental	Retroflex	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Stops	ph [p ^h ~ϕ~pʰ] b	th [t ^h ~tʰ] d	ṭh [tʰ~ṭʰ] ḍ [ḍ]		kh [k ^h ~kʰ] g	ʔ
Fricatives		s [s~ɕ]				h
Affricates		ch [tʰ~tɕʰ] j [dz~z]				
Nasals	m	n			ŋ	
Liquids		l, r				
Glides	w			y [j]		

Table 2: Consonants in Boro

	Bilabial	Dental	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Stops	ph [p ^h ~ϕ~pʰ] b	th [t ^h] d		kh [k ^h ~kʰ] g	ʔ
Fricatives		s ([s~ɕ])			h
Affricates		j [dz]			
Nasals	m	n		ŋ	
Liquids		l, r			
Glides	w		y [j]		

The second consonant may be filled with the liquids, giving rise to the initial clusters, /pʰl/, /pʰr/, /bl/, /br/, /thl/, /thr/, /khl/, /khr/, /gl/, /gr/, /chl/ (MB only), /jl/, /sl/, /sr/.³ The final consonants are different between the MB dialects and the B dialects. See below for details.⁴ Some of the initial clusters are formed by the omission of the weak mid-central vowel /ə/ in the MB and the high-back unrounded vowel /u/ in the B. For example, the suffix that denotes ‘male’ is *-jəla* in the MB dialects and *-jula* in the B dialects, and when it is spoken fast, the vowel in the first syllable drops out and the initial cluster /jl/ occurs. In Boro and Boḍo, the initial cluster /sn/ appears in *sni* ‘seven’ and related words, but this is the only instance of the *sn* cluster. Since Meche does not use what is supposed to be native numbers larger than five, the *sn* cluster does not exist in this variety.

2.1.1.2. Initial consonants

In the three dialects, there is a contrast between voiced and voiceless stops, the latter of which is accompanied by aspiration. For example, ‘blood’ and ‘water’ contrast

in the initial consonants between /tʰ/ and /d/, as in *thəi* and *dəi* in the MB dialects and *thui* and *dui* in the B dialects.

Absence of /ch/ in Boro

The most remarkable difference in phonology between Meche/Boḍo and Boro is the absence of the aspirated alveolar affricate /ch/ [tʰʰ] in Boro. In the MB dialects, /ch/ exists and the words that start with the consonant in the MB dialects regularly correspond to /s/ in Boro. Here are some examples: ‘one’: *-che* (MB) and *-se* (B); ‘dog’: *chəima* (MB) and *suima* (B); ‘arrive’: *chuphəi* (MB) and *suphui* (B).

Due to the absence of the distinction between /ch/ and /s/ in Boro, the words that are minimally distinctive by the two consonants in the MB dialects take the same form in the B dialects: for instance *chu* ‘wash’ and *su* ‘stab’ in the MB correspond to *su*.⁵

An explanation for the fact that /ch/ exists in Meche and Boḍo requires a theory of Proto-Bodo-Garo (PTB). Joseph & Burling (2006) discuss the Proto-Boro-Garo initials and have a list of correspondences with respect

Table 3 : Some correspondences between sibilants and /ch/ in the PBG and the five varieties

Gloss	PBG	Tiwa	Boro	Garó	Rabha	MB
	*s	s	s	s	s	s
ask, question v.t.	suŋ ²	sóŋ-	súŋ-	siŋʔ-	súŋ-	səŋ-
burn v.t.	sao ²	s'(u)-	sáo-	soʔ-	só-	sau-
	*sh	sh	s	s	s	ch
arrive, reach	shok	shó-	só-	sok-	sòk-	chó-
have a pain, ache	sha ¹	shâ-	sâ-	sa-	sâ-	cha-
one (number)	-sha ⁴	-sha, -sa	-s(e)	-sa	-sa	-che
	*S	-	s	s	s	ch
rot v.i.	Sao ¹	(khú-ya)	s'(eo)-	so-	sò-	cheu-
soak	Sum	(c)om ‘be wet’	súm-	simʔ-	sú-	chəm-
wet v.i.	Si ⁴	(lêr, adj.)	gi-si-	so-si-	(súm-)	chi-

to sibilants. Table 3 is based on their list of correspondences among PTB, Tiwa, Boro, Garo and Rabha. I add a column for the respective MB words. In the Proto-Boro-Garo, two sibilants, /sh/ and /s/, are reconstructed.⁶ They also use *S for those correspondences that Tiwa has no examples.

Joseph & Burling's reconstruction of *s and *sh might be valid and further confirmed by the data from Meche/Boḍo: there is a correspondence between /ch/ in MB and /sh/ in Tiwa, which in turn makes the reconstruction of *sh in PTB valid. It is possible to assume such a scenario that in Meche and Boḍo, /sh/ has changed into /ch/ while /s/ remains intact. Based on this assumption, the Tiwa words for the PTB forms with *S will be considered to have the initial /sh/.

Yet it is more plausible to consider that the reconstruction should be *s and *ch in PTB, because the PTB words with the initial *sh or *S in Table 3, except 'arrive', correspond to the reconstructed forms that begin with *ts or *ti in Proto-Tibeto-Burman, based on the data in Matisoff (2003): that is, 'pain' as *tsa-t, 'one' as *(g-)tyak~*ka~*it~*t(y)ik, 'rot' as *tswəy, 'soak' as *t(w)i(y), and 'wet' as *m-ti-s.⁷ Based on this assumption, it will be decided that only the MB dialects retain the initial /ch/ but that the change /ch/→/sh/→/s/ has taken place in the other varieties.⁸

Absence of the retroflex stops

Boro lacks the retroflex stops /ʈh/ and /ɖ/ in the MB dialects, and the words with the retroflex stops in the MB dialects are all rendered in /th/ and /d/ respectively. For example, in the MB dialects, 'market' is *hathai* and 'tooth' is *hathai*. In Boro, both of them are pronounced as *hathai*, but they are in different tones, as in *hathái* and *hathai* respectively. In the MB dialects, 'to be alive' is *ṭhaj* and 'to go' is *thaj*, which correspond to *thaj* and *tháj* respectively in Boro.⁹ The two examples show that the correspondences between the retroflex and

a particular tone are not regular. In the MB dialects, such minimal pairs shown above are very few; especially I have not found any minimal pairs for /ɖ/ and /d/ yet; some words alternate /ɖ/ with /d/: for example, if *duduj* 'rope' is pronounced as /duduj/, native speakers do not reject it, at least in Meche.

The correspondence between /b/ and /ph/

Another difference is the correspondence between /b/ and /ph/. Although all the three dialects have words whose initial consonants are either /b/ or /ph/, the initial /b/ of some words in MB corresponds to /ph/ in Boro. The followings are such words: for example, 'father' *bipha* (MB) and *phipha* (B); 'fruit' *bithai* (MB) and *phithai* (B); and 'child' *bisa* (MB) and *phisa* (B).¹⁰ As shown in Section 3, the /ph/ version is found in the MB as well, and the native speakers who allow the pronunciation tend to claim both forms are correct.

Absence of initial consonants

Some words that have an initial consonant in the MB correspond to the ones without it in Boro. For example, the word for rain is *nokha* in the MB dialects, while it is *isokha* in Boro. Another example is the word for 'priest', which is *roja* in the MB dialects whereas it is *oja* in Boro. The opposite case is found with the copula verb stem: *nur-* (B) and *əŋ-* (MB).

2.1.1.3 Final consonants

Final stops are pronounced without a release in the three languages. There is a difference between the MB and the B dialects with respect to which stops occur as the coda. In the MB dialects, /b/, /t/, /d/, /t̚/ and /k/ occur, while in the B dialects only /b/ and /k/ occur. The bilabial voiceless stop /p/ and the velar voiceless stop /k/ occur in the coda only in borrowings, such as *phap* (Skt. pāp) 'sin' and *asik* (NP. āsik) 'blessing'. The final stop /b/ often sounds like /p/ to non-Bodos, but

the native speakers consistently insist that it be /b/, not /p/. For instance, the verb ‘to stick something on another’ is *sithab*. I have not tested the final /b/ in terms of acoustic phonetics. In this paper, I simply follow the intuition of the native speakers.

The same pattern goes with the dental stops in the MB dialects. Though they are not distinctive, there is an intuitive difference observed between the final /t/ and /d/ depending on words.¹¹ For example, the verb ‘to kill’ is often written as *sithat*, not *sithad*, while the verb ‘to become big’ is usually written as *ded*, not *det*. The consonant /d/ appears either in the initial or final. However, phonetically /t/ and /d/ seem to be interchangeable in the final position, so *ded* may be pronounced as *det*. In the B dialects, the final dental stops in MB appear as /ɾ/ instead, hence *sithar* and *der*. This correspondence is regular. In the MB dialects, a few words end with the retroflex / such as *hoʔ* ‘give’. The retroflex final consonant also corresponds to the rhotic /ɾ/ in the B dialects, as in *hor* ‘give’. Burling (2008:48) points out that the words with the final /ɾ/ that corresponds to /t/ bear a high tone, while those that end with the /ɾ/ but do not have such a correspondence bear a low tone.

2.1.1.4. Vowels

There is not much difference among the three dialects in terms of vowels. The only difference between the MB dialects and Boro is found with what Burling (2008:66) calls “the sixth vowel”, which is found in many northeast Indian Tibeto-Burman languages. All the dialects have /a/, /i/, /u/, /e/, /o/ and in addition as the sixth vowel, Boro has /ʉ/, which corresponds to /ə/ in Meche and Boḍo, as in *gʉjʉm* in the B dialect and *gəjən* in the MB dialects.

2.1.1.5. Diphthongs

Like the vowels, there is not much difference among the three dialects regarding diphthongs, either, but the diphthongs formed with the sixth vowel are different. In Meche and Boḍo, /iu/, /eu/, /əi/, /əu/, /au/, /ai/, and /oi/ are found. Boro has all the diphthongs found in the MB except /əi/ and /əu/. In Boro /əi/ and /əu/ correspond to /ui/ and /ou/ respectively. When I compared the pronunciation of the word ‘liquor’, for instance, it is pronounced as *jəu* in Meche and *jou* in Boro. This holds true with the accusative enclitic. It is pronounced as *khəu* in Meche while it is pronounced as *khou* in Boro.

One interesting correspondence between the MB dialects and the B dialects with respect to diphthong is the one between /ai/ and /n/. There is only one case of this. In Boro, the sunlight is *sandunʃ* which consists of *san* ‘the sun’ and *duŋ* ‘become hot’. In Meche and some Boḍo dialects, it is a possible form but another form *saidunʃ* is also possible.

In sum, the most evident phonetic characteristic that divides the two dialectal groups is the correspondence between /ch/ and /s/. The western dialects consistently have /ch/. As my impression, the initial voiceless alveolar affricate /ch/ was actually heard in utterances of a man from Kokrajhar, though he did not distinguish /ch/ and /s/ at all when I tested him. The voiceless affricate may be considered an allophone in this dialect.

2.1.2 Morpho-syntax

The MB dialects and the B dialect are not so much different with respect to grammar. The followings are what I have recognized so far.

2.1.2.1. A grammatical extension of the nominative enclitic in the MB dialects

The nominative enclitic in the three dialects is =a, and the accusative enclitic is =*khəu/khou*, although they are

not obligatory.¹² Kiryu (2009) discusses the grammatical extension of the nominative enclitic into a discourse marker in Meche. He argues that the nominative marker may precede the accusative marker, as in (2).

- (2) (*bərai=ya*) *burəi=a=khəu* *phəsi-dəŋ*
 old.man=NOM old.woman=DM=ACC support-PROG
 ‘(The old man) supported his wife.’

In this example, there is a marker =*a* between the object noun and the accusative marker. It is possible to omit the =*a* marker, but there is a difference between the two. The object with the marker is more prominent in the discourse, which has to do with focus, topicality and cohesion.¹² Kiryu (2009) assumes the origin of the discourse marker is the nominative case marker, which bears the function of marking a topic. The Boro dialects do not have this kind of marker at all.

2.1.2.2. Tense expressions

There are only a few differences with respect to tense and aspect among the three dialects, but the differences are significant. In Boro, simple future is expressed by *-gwn*, as in *aŋ thaŋ-gwŋ* [1SG.NOM go-FUT] ‘I will go.’ It is possible to use the suffix in Meche and Boḍo, but much more generally *-nai* is used to refer to a future event as in *aŋ thaŋ-nai*. The suffix *-nai* is originally a nominalizer, hence *thaŋ-nai* is used as a verbal noun or an adnominal marker as in *thaŋ-nai mansi* [go-NMZN man] ‘the man who went’. As an adnominal marker, it carries perfective connotations and in turn gives rise to the past interpretation. Likewise, in Boro, if the nominalized form is used in a matrix clause, which is often observed in story-telling, it refers to a past event in sequence. However, as noted above, in Meche and Boḍo, the matrix clause use of the suffix *-nai* is referring to future.

Another difference in tense interpretation comes from

the expressions *dəŋ-mən* in Meche and Boḍo and *duŋ-mun* in Boro. The expressions literally form past progressive, for the auxiliary verb *dəŋ/duŋ* expresses continuous tense and *mən/mun* marks past. However, the *duŋ-mun* in Boro is used to refer to simple past as well. Therefore, in Meche and Boḍo, *aŋ thaŋ-dəŋ-mən* means ‘I was going (in the process of going)’ but in Boro *aŋ thaŋ-duŋ-mun* means ‘I went’ as a simple past.

2.1.2.2. Nominalization marker in the MB dialects

In noun modification, there are two markers that are attached to the dependent. When a noun modifies a noun, it requires the genitive marker =*ni*, and when a verb modifies a noun, it takes either =*gra* or =*nai*. The genitive may function as referential as in *aŋ=ni* ‘mine’, which is a headless NP. The nominalizer =*gra* is aspectually imperfective while =*nai* is perfective. ‘What I ate’ is expressed by the complex *aŋ ja=nai* in Boro. In Meche, this is the same, but the complex may be structurally extended by =*ni* in Meche, as in *aŋ ja=nai=ni* ‘the one I ate’. The two versions with or without the genitive marker do not differ in the referential meaning. This complex form is not available in Boro. The =*ni* is not a genitive case marker in this case. A similar pattern is found in Japanese dialects, as discussed in Shibatani (2010). The current author’s mother tongue, the Tokyo dialect, has such a form as *boku=no=no* [me=GEN]=NMZN ‘the one of mine’, too. Shibatani argues that the second =*no* in Japanese is a nominalization marker that has a referential function. The Meche’s *aŋ ja=nai=ni* is also parallel to the Japanese phrase above, in which the second =*no* plays a referential function. Along the same line, the genitive marker =*ni* may be considered to be grammaticalized into a nominalization marker in Meche and Boḍo.

3. Some lexical variations among the Meche and Boḍo dialects

In this section, I will discuss the lexical contiguity among the MB dialects. In 2009, I visited seven settlements across the state of West Bengal, and I conducted elicitations from the Bodos. During this short trip across northern West Bengal, I collected about thirty words. Based on the data, I discuss some variations found among the dialects in the area.

The map in Figure 2 indicates the location of the seven settlements I visited: that is, (1) Hasimara, (2) Ranggaribajana, (3) Narsingpur, (4) Odlabari, (5) Salugara, (6) Tripalijot and (7) Naxalbari. It also indicates three Meche habitats in Nepal.¹³



Figure 2: A map of settlements in northern West Bengal and Nepal

3.1. Phonological contiguity

As discussed in Section 2, there are phonological correspondences between the MB dialects and the B dialects. In reality, there are some phonological variations even among the West Bengal dialects and the phonological variations are contiguous from Assam. First, the initial /b/-/ph/ correspondence is found in the eastern sides of the MB dialects, in Hasimara, Ranggaribajana, and Narsingpur. In Hasimara, ‘fruit’, ‘child’ and ‘father’ have the initial /ph/ instead of /b/, like Boro. However, in Hasimara *bipha* ‘father’ is also possible, and in Ranggaribajana, only *bipha* is possible. In Narsingpur, the consultant provided the /ph/ versions of the words. To the west from Odlabari, only the /b/

initial is found, but the 38 year-old consultant in Tripalijot provided both *bithai* and *phithai* for ‘fruit’.

The dental aspirated voiceless affricate /ch/ is consistent throughout all the villages I visited, as in *che* ‘one’ (B. -*se*), *bachin* to ‘ambush and attach’ (B. *barsin*), *chəima/chima* ‘dog’ (B. -*suima*), *iche* ‘a little’ (B. *ise*). For ‘a little’, two different variations were also found, *khiche* and *khichi*. In the eastern part from (1) to (3), only *khiche* was elicited. The consultants there unanimously rejected *iche* or *ise*. In Odlabari, both *iche* and *khichi* were obtained. In Meche, *iche* has an allomorph *eche*.

An alternation between the final nasals is observed. The word for earthquake in Meche is *gangriṅ* while in Boro it is *bangriṅ*. The words show the correspondence in the initial consonant /g/ and /b/. In West Bengal dialects, all take /g/ as the initial consonant, but the final consonants vary between /ŋ/ and /m/. At the places (1), (2) and (3), only *gangrim* was elicited. To the west, the word form turned to be *gangriṅ*, except in Tripalijot, where *gangrim* was elicited. The consultant in Hasimara pointed out that *gangriṅ* referred to an ankle.

4. Conclusion

I have presented some comparative data between western Boro dialects spoken in Nepal and northern West Bengal, that is, Meche and Boḍo, and the eastern Boro dialect spoken in Assam, that is, Boro. Although it is now often the case that the Boro varieties spoken in Nepal, northern West Bengal and Assam are considered to be the same, the comparison here has demonstrated that the western Boro dialects in northern West Bengal and Nepal are different from the eastern Boro dialect in some significant ways. Another important point that has come out of the comparison is that **ch* can be reconstructed in the PTB instead of **sh* as Joseph and Burling (2006) propose. A further research based on a comparison with other varieties

such as Dimasa, Chutiya and Kokborok is necessary for further elaboration. This will be a future research.

Abbreviations

ACC: accusative, CONT: continuous, DM: discourse marker, FUT: future, GEN: genitive, NMZN: nominalization marker, NP: noun phrase, NOM: nominative; SG: singular, Skt.: Sanskrit; -: a marker that indicates morpheme boundary, =: a marker that indicates clitic boundary

Notes

¹ British Library Manuscript Archives, Hodgson No. 39/11 ff. 72-103. “Note on the Mechis”.

² The consonants in brackets are allophones. The multi-lined cells have voiceless consonants in the upper row and voiced consonants in the lower one.

³ Joseph & Burling (2006) assume the initial cluster *sk* and *skl* in Boro in the list of . Although they do not give a clear explanation for them, it seems that they consider the clusters are phenomena of fast speech due to the dropout of a vowel between the *s* and the following consonant(s).

⁴ Boro is considered to be a tone language, which distinguishes high and low tones. Likewise, Meche and Boḍo seem to have a tonal distinction. The author has not systematically detected the syllabic tone in Meche and Boḍo so far. However, words that are usually claimed to be in the high tone has a glottal stop, as in *ja*^ʔ ‘eat’, which contrasts with the low tone word *ja* ‘become, happen’. Furthermore, the glottal stop that is associated with the high tone disappears when the word is followed by a clitic. For instance, the word ‘house’ is *no*^ʔ, but when it is followed by the accusative case clitic=*khəu*, the glottal stop disappears. Likewise, when a high tone verb appears in the conjunctive participle form, the glottal stop disappears, as in *ja-nanəi*, which superficially does not distinguish between ‘eat’ and ‘become,’ but the high pitch shifts to the right, giving rise to *ja-nánəi*, for [eat-CP] and *ja-nanə́i*, for [become-CP]. Due to

the limit of space for a detailed discussion on the tonal difference, I do not always take tones into account in this paper. See Weidert (1987) for Boro tones, and Kiryu (2008) for a short discussion of Meche tone.

⁵ The Boro *su* are ambiguous between ‘to wash’ and ‘to stab’ with the same high tone. In Meche, I am not sure whether the respective word *chu* has a glottal stop.

⁶ For the existence of the *s/sh* contrast in Tiwa, Joseph & Burling (2006:54-56) suggest influence from Khasi, which is a Mon-Khmer language and distinguishes *s* and *sh*, through a language contact.

⁷ The word for ‘arrive’ in PTB is reconstructed as **la* in Matisoff (2003).

⁸ Due to the limitation of the paper, I do not enter into a full-fledged examination of the correspondences between the words listed in Joseph and Burling (2006) and the respective MB words. However, based on my examination, there are 19 words that has the /ch/ affricate in Meche that are reconstructed as words with either **sh* or **S* by J&B. Not all the words with **sh* or **S* in J&B’s PTB forms, 31 in total, correspond to /ch/ in Meche. A full-fledged discussion will be made in a different paper in the future.

⁹ According to the reviewer, the retroflex in *thaj* may be a reflex of the PTB **s-raj*. The reviewer also points out that the word market *hathai* has its origin in the Indo-Aryan word with the voiceless non-aspirated retroflex stop.

¹⁰ The initial /b/ and /ph/ consonants are part of the prefixes *bi-* (MB) and *phi-* (B) respectively. The reviewer points out that the prefixes with the initial consonants correspond to the one with a nasal in Usoi, a dialect of Tripuri (Boro-Garo). As the reviewer’s comment, there may be a difference between the words with the prefixes and those without them in terms of the /b/-/ph/ correspondence. A further investigation is yet to be made regarding this.

¹¹ The reviewer points out a possibility that there is a difference in the length of the vowel before the final /t/ and /d/, as in the case with the German words *Rad* ‘wheel’ and *Rat* ‘advice’. For the time being, I have no idea about the

length of the vowels in the words that end with /d/ and those that end with /t/, although it might be the case.

¹² There is another nominative enclitic =ə, but this is only attached to 1st and 2nd person singular pronouns, so I exclude this in the discussion.

¹³ The map is created, based on a free downloadable outline map at <http://d-maps.com>. My Meche data are collected mainly in Jalthal and Ghadamara.

References

- Bhattacharya, Pramod Chandra (1977) *A Descriptive Analysis of the Boro Language*. Gauhati: Department of Publication, Gauhati University.
- Burling, Robbins (2008) 'Change with Continuity in the Boro-Garo Languages'. In Stephen Morey and Mark Post (Eds.) *North East Indian Linguistics*. 65-72.
- Endle, Sydney (1911) *The Kacháris*, London: Macmillan & Co.
- Hodgson, Brian Houghton (1880a) *Miscellaneous Essays Related to Indian Subjects Vol I*. London: Trübner & Co., Ludgate Hill (Reprinted version in 1992, New Delhi: Asian Educational Services).
- Hodgson, Brian Houghton (1880b) *Miscellaneous Essays Related to Indian Subjects Vol II*. London: Trübner & Co., Ludgate Hill (Reprinted version in 1992, New Delhi: Asian Educational Services).
- Joseph, U. V. and Robbins Burling (2006) *The Comparative Phonology of the Boro-Garo Languages*. Mysore: Central Institute of Indian Languages.
- Kiryu, Kazuyuki (2008) *An Outline of the Meche Language: Grammar, Text and Glossary*. A report booklet of Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Studies, the Ministry of Education, Sports, Science and Culture, Japan. Mimasaka University.
- Kiryu, Kazuyuki (2009) Grammaticalization of the nominative marker =a into a discourse marker in Meche, a paper presented at the 5th annual meeting of North East Indian Linguistic Society, Don Bosco Institute, Guwahati.
- Matisoff, James A. (2003) *Handbook of Proto-Tibeto-Burman*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Shibatani, Masayoshi (2010) Gengo shuutoku to gengo riron: juntai joshi "no" to goyoo "akai no kutsu" o megutte (Language acquisition and linguistic theory: semi-nominal *no* and an issue related to the error in "akai no kutsu"), a special lecture delivered at IJS Symposium 2010 *Nihongo Kenkyuu no Shiten (Perspectives in the Study of Japanese)*, Kobe University.
- Skrefsrud, Lars Olsen. Rev. (1889) *A Short Grammar of the Mech or Boro Language, together with a small vocabulary*. Ebenezer: Indian Home Mission's Press.
- Weidert, A. K. (1984), 'The Classifier Construction of Newari and its Southeast Asian background', *Kailash* 11(3-4): 185-210.
- Weidert, A. (1987), *Tibeto-Burman Tonology: A Comparative Account*, Amsterdam: John Benjamins.