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A Study On Gender Distinction In Bodo

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Abstract:

Bodo language belongs to the Tibeto-Burman group of Sino-Tibetan language family. Bodo language is one of the oldest languages of Assam, North-East India. It is also associate state language of Assam. This language has its own features in linguistic level. It has six vowel phonemes and sixteen consonant phonemes. Presently Bodo language speaking people are fairly scattered throughout the Assam and its neighboring states like- Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Mizoram, Tripura, West Bengal and some areas of adjoining countries like- Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, etc. In present paper it tries to study the processes of gender distinction in Bodo language. There are two types of gender masculine and feminine gender. The study is prepared based on data from both primary and secondary sources. Being native speaker of Bodo, the researchers have collected primary data through observation method. Secondary data has been collected through review of relevant literatures.

Keywords: Gender, Masculine, Feminine, Suffix

1. Gender

Gender is a grammatical category used in some languages to classify nouns. A Grammatical category used for the analysis of word classes displaying such contrast as masculine feminine neuter, animate inanimate, etc. Discussion of this concept in linguistics has generally focused upon the need to distinguish natural gender, where items refer to the sex of real-world entities, and grammatical gender, which has nothing to do with sex, but which has an important role in signalling grammatical relationships between words in a sentence (Crystal 1980:158). Bodo has natural gender system. So, in Bodo, gender distinction is realized based on sex variation of animateness. Inanimate objects do not bear the concept of sex variation. So, there exist two kinds of gender i.e., *masculine* and *feminine* gender. Male represents masculine and female represents feminine gender gradually. Most Tibeto-Burman languages have the more common affinities in the system of gender distinction.

2. Existing works on Gender distinction in Bodo

Some grammarians and researchers have worked on gender distinction process of this language.

Hodgson, B.H. (1847) has done first ever study on Bodo language. Studying Bodo gender system, he describes that Bodo has no simple words equivalent to the English boy and girl, and the sex of minor is therefore expressed by *huwa got^ho* 'man child', *hinjou got^ho* 'woman child'. Further he mentions sex among animals generally, exclusive of human beings, is expressed by the post-fixes *jola* and *jo* equivalent to male and female e.g.- *mushu-jola* 'a bull', *mushu-jo* 'cow'.

Endle, Rev. Sidney (1884) also discusses gender system of noun. He writes nouns denoting inanimate objects have no formal distinction of gender e.g.- *no* 'a house', *mai* 'rice' (paddy), etc. and nouns denoting animate objects have their gender distinguished by a qualifying word placed after the noun whose gender it indicates. These words vary as applied to distinct classes of objects e.g.-

(a) *huuwa* 'man' (male), *hinzaw* 'woman' (female) these are applied exclusively to human beings.

(b) Goats, dears, etc. '*pant^ha*', *pant^hi* are the term used

(c) Birds -*zuula*, -*zuu*: *dauzuula* 'cock' and *dauzuu* 'hen'

Again, he comments the final vowel is *a*, when they denote the masculine gender; and *i*, when they designate the feminine.

Bhattacharya, Promod Chandra (1977) describes about three ways to express gender distinction: (i) Using separate noun bases for male and female beings, (ii) Using separate qualifying words to noun bases and (iii) Using suffixes, here he discusses three kinds of gender suffixes like *-zla*: *-zui*, *-sruun*: *-sri*, *-a*: *-i*. He mentions another one kind of gender suffix: *-brai*: *-brui* that indicates gods and goddesses.

According to Skrefsrud, Rev. L. (1889) in Bodo, there is no distinction of gender in connection with nouns which denote inanimate objects, but nouns denoting animate objects make a distinction with regard to gender, viz. between masculine and feminine, the first having a qualifying word ending in *a*, whilst the second (feminine) has a qualifying word ending *i*. e.g.,

For cattle: *halua* (male), *gai* (female)

For deer, sheep, goats: *p^hant^ha* (male), *p^hant^hi* (female)

For foxes, dogs: *bangra* (male), *bangri* (female)

Baro, Madhu Ram (1990) explains three processes of gender distinction namely (i) by using different noun bases, (ii) by positing different qualifying words having the meaning of opposite sex before or after the common words and (iii) by suffixing different morphemes indicating opposite sex of male and female.

Basumatary, Phukan (2005) also discusses about the gender system and the process of gender distinction. He writes three kinds of gender distinction processes and also mentions neutral form of gender and unique form of gender.

Chainary, Swarna Prabha (2012) also describes about gender system and mentions three processes of gender distinction that change from masculine to feminine.

Brahma, Aleendra (2013) has done a typological analytical description on the structure of Bodo language. In the study of gender, he mentions about inherent masculine and feminine.

Brahma, Raje (2019) analyses about the vocabularies of Bodo in his doctoral dissertation. He writes three gender suffixes: *-i*, *-e* and *-u* that are added to male denoting nouns to change from masculine to feminine.

3. Aim and Objectives

This study aims to study at finding out all probable ways of gender distinction and analysing them in detail of the said language.

4. Process of gender distinction:

The process of gender distinction refers to how languages mark or differentiate gender in various aspects of grammar and vocabulary. In the Bodo language, gender distinction is relatively limited compared to Indo-European languages like Hindi or English. Bodo does not have a complex system of grammatical gender. However, there are lexical and semantic ways in which gender can be distinguished. There are chiefly three processes of gender distinction in Bodo. These are illustrated below:

(a) By adding suffix

There is a process to distinguish gender by adding suffix to the noun. By adding suffix masculine gender can be changed into feminine gender. It is observed that usually gender is changed from masculine to feminine but not from feminine to masculine in this language. There are three feminine denoting suffixes these are *-i*, *-e* and *-a*. These suffixes are added to the male denoting noun to change from masculine to feminine. For example:

Masculine

benga 'a deaf man'

p^hagla 'a mad man'

hait^ha 'a short man'

nabla 'a man of flat nose'

Feminine

bengi 'a deaf woman'

p^hagli 'a mad woman'

hait^hu 'a short woman'

nable 'a woman of flat nose'

(b) By using opposite word

In case of the kinship term, gender distinction is made by using opposite words referring to masculine and feminine respectively. For example:

Masculine

ada 'my elder brother'
ap^ha 'my father'
abuu 'my grandfather'
amai 'maternal uncle'
p^həŋbai 'younger brother'
adui 'maternal uncle'
bihau 'father in law'

Feminine

bazui 'elder brother's wife'
ai 'my mother'
abuui 'my grandmother'
anui 'maternal aunt'
binanaw 'younger sister'
madui 'paternal aunt'
bik^hunzuu 'mother in law'

There are a few kinship terms which indicate both gender male and female. To denote gender distinction through such word the attributive words are used after kinship term. For example:

Masculine

aijəŋ huua

Feminine

aijəŋ hinzau

(c) By using attributive word

Another way of gender distinction in this language is the use of attributive word referring to different sexes (male or female) to common noun. These attributive words may precede or follow the common noun. It is also observed that there are different attributive words for human, animal and bird. This is very productive way of gender distinction in this language as given below:

For human: The attributive word *huua* 'male' and *hinzaw* 'female' are used for human nouns. For example:

Masculine

huua sa 'male child'
huua alasi 'male guest'
p^hisuu zuu 'grandson'
p^hisa zuu 'son'

Feminine

hinzaw sa 'female child'
hinzaw alasi 'female guest'
p^hisuu zuu 'granddaughter'
p^hisa zuu 'daughter'

For animal: *bunda*, *p^hant^ha*, *damra* and *baŋgra* are used in case of male animal, on the other hand *bundi*, *p^hant^hi*, *damri* and *baŋgri* are used in case of female animal. For example:

Masculine

əma bunda 'male pig'
mawzi bunda 'male cat'
burma p^hant^ha 'he got'
muusu damra 'male calf'
suima baŋgra 'male dog'

Feminine

əma bundi 'female pig'
mawzi bundi 'female cat'
burma p^hant^hi 'she got'
muusu damri 'female calf'
suima baŋgri 'female dog'

For bird: The word *zuu* and *zui* are used for bird, fish and insect to denote male and female respectively. For example:

Masculine

dau zuu 'cock'
na zuu 'male fish'
daut^hu zuu 'male dove'
daubo zuu 'male heron'
sik^hiri zuu 'male butterfly'
bere zuu 'male bee'
t^hamp^hui zuu 'male mosquito'

Feminine

dau zui 'hen'
na zui 'female fish'
daut^hu zui 'female dove'
daubo zui 'female heron'
sik^hiri zui 'female butterfly'
bere zui 'female bee'
t^hamp^hui zui 'female mosquito'

Unique form of gender: Certain human and non-human animate nouns are traditionally assigned either a uniquely masculine or feminine gender. These nouns have no contrast gender as well as they cannot be converted into the opposite gender by adding gender markers. Instead, they are inherently associated with either the masculine or feminine gender based on traditional notion. Examples include such gender-specific nouns:

Unique masculine gender: The following noun words are always masculine gender and do not have female correspondence. These are as follows:

duuri 'priest'
 badari 'wood cutter'
 lauk^har 'cowboy'
 barlamp^ha 'a responsible person who leads the bride groom's party by dancing in the marriage ceremony'.

Unique feminine gender: The following noun words are always feminine gender and do not have male correspondence. These are as follows:

duudini 'a sanctified woman of the Kherai worship.'
 bihari 'co-wife'
 bok^hali 'a baby nurser'
 sañrema 'a barren woman'
 ak^huzi 'a woman who ignores weaving and embroidery'
 buirat^hi 'a woman who serves betel-nut in the marriage ceremony'

Neutral forms of Gender: Certain human and non-human animate nouns do not exhibit any gender distinction. Without the addition of gender markers or attributive words, it is often challenging to determine the gender of these nouns when used in isolation. Such nouns are classified under the category of common or neutral gender. Examples include:

alasi 'guest'
 k^hudia 'child'
 muusu 'cow'
 phurungiri 'teacher' etc.

Bodo has natural gender system. So, it has two kinds of gender i.e., masculine and feminine. There are three feminine denoting suffixes viz. *-i*, *-e*, and *-a* which are added to masculine denoting words to convert into feminine. Gender distinction is also made by using opposite word and attributive words.

5. Conclusion

The gender system in the Bodo language is primarily based on natural gender, with distinctions made mainly for animate beings. Unlike languages with complex grammatical gender systems, Bodo marks gender through lexical and morphological means. Three main processes are used to express gender distinction: the addition of suffixes (such as *-i*, *-e*, *-u*), the use of opposite words in kinship terms, and the use of gender-specific attributive words for humans, animals, and birds. Some nouns are uniquely masculine or feminine and cannot be converted, while others remain gender-neutral without further context or modifiers. Existing literature supports that Bodo aligns with typical Tibeto-Burman patterns, emphasizing semantic rather than syntactic gender. Although simple, Bodo's gender system is rich in cultural and linguistic significance, reflecting how social and biological factors shape linguistic expression. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of how gender distinctions are structured and conveyed in the Bodo language.

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