

Bilingualism: A Case Study of Assamese and Bodo Classifiers

Authors : Samhita Bharadwaj

Abstract : This is an empirical study of classifiers in Assamese and Bodo, two genetically unrelated languages of India. The objective of the paper is to address the language contact between Assamese and Bodo as reflected in classifiers. The data has been collected through fieldwork in Bodo recording narratives and folk tales and eliciting specific data from the speakers. The data for Assamese is self-produced as native speaker of the language. Assamese is the easternmost New-Indo-Aryan (henceforth NIA) language mainly spoken in the Brahmaputra valley of Assam and some other north-eastern states of India. It is the lingua franca of Assam and is creolised in the neighbouring state of Nagaland. Bodo, on the other hand, is a Tibeto-Burman (henceforth TB) language of the Bodo-Garo group. It has the highest number of speakers among the TB languages of Assam. However, compared to Assamese, it is still a lesser documented language and due to the prestige of Assamese, all the Bodo speakers are fluent bi-lingual in Assamese, though the opposite isn't the case. With this context, classifiers, a characteristic phenomenon of TB languages, but not so much of NIA languages, presents an interesting case study on language contact caused by bilingualism. Assamese, as a result of its language contact with the TB languages which are rich in classifiers; has developed the richest classifier system among the IA languages in India. Yet, as a part of rampant borrowing of Assamese words and patterns into Bodo; Bodo is seen to borrow even Assamese classifiers into its system. This paper analyses the borrowed classifiers of Bodo and finds the route of this borrowing phenomenon in the number system of the languages. As the Bodo speakers start replacing the higher numbers from five with Assamese ones, they also choose the Assamese classifiers to attach to these numbers. Thus, the partial loss of number in Bodo as a result of language contact and bilingualism in Assamese is found to be the reason behind the borrowing of classifiers in Bodo. The significance of the study lies in exploring an interesting aspect of language contact in Assam. It is hoped that this will attract further research on bilingualism and classifiers in Assam.

Keywords : Assamese, bi-lingual, Bodo, borrowing, classifier, language contact

Conference Title : ICSRD 2020 : International Conference on Scientific Research and Development

Conference Location : Chicago, United States

Conference Dates : December 12-13, 2020