

A Lexical Comparison of A'we, Am'beng and Atong, Dialects of Garo

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ABSTRACT: The paper attempts to bring out the lexical similarities and differences between the three dialects of Garo (A'we, Am'beng and Atong) and to show the extent of relatedness between them. A'we is spoken in the northern, Am'beng is spoken in the western and Atong is spoken in the southern parts of Garo Hills. The paper focuses mainly on the comparative study between lexical items of the three dialects. The comparison is made based on few selected lexical items of A'we, Am'beng and Atong. The study is limited to body parts, kinship terms, colour terms, numerals, flora and fauna, events and actions.

Keywords: Garo, lexical, body parts, kinship terms, colour terms.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Garo is one of the Tibeto-Burman languages spoken in North Eastern part of India. The term 'Garo' stands for both the tribe and the language. The Garos call themselves 'A'chik' which means 'hillmen' (Sangma, 1984). The Garos are inhabitants of Meghalaya and the language is mainly spoken in the Garo Hills. Apart from Meghalaya, Garos are also found in many districts of Assam such as Kamrup, Goalpara and Karbi Anglong. They are also scattered in the states of Tripura, West Bengal, and a few of them in Nagaland. According to Burling (2004), Garos are also found in Bangladesh, particularly, in the border areas.

According to the Ethnologue Report 2007, the total population of Garo in India is 7, 80,000. The Ethnologue Report (2007) mentions the presence of 120,000 Garo speakers in Bangladesh. According to the Census of India 2001, the total population of Garo in India is recorded to be 6, 89,639.

Burling (2003:175) classified Garo under Bodo group, a Tibeto-Burman language family¹. Burling (2004) mentions that Garo has some similarities with Boro-Kachari, Rabha, Dimasa and Kok-Borok languages. He also added that Garo has a number of dialects². A total number of eleven dialects of Garo are identified by him. These are:

1. A'we
2. Am'beng
3. Atong
4. Chisak
5. Matchi
6. Dual
7. Gara-Ganching
8. Chibok
9. Matabeng
10. Ruga
11. Me'gam

According to Burling (2004), A'we is accepted to be the standard dialect and it is mainly spoken in the northern and eastern parts of Garo Hills. Chisak is spoken in the north-eastern part of Garo Hills. Matchi and Dual are spoken in the east-central portion of the hills and Gara-Ganching and Chibok are spoken in the south. Matabeng is spoken in areas north of the Simsang River. Atong is found to be spoken along the Simsang (Someswari) river in the south-eastern corner of the Garo Hills. Ruga is spoken in a small area in the south central part of the Garo Hills. Like Atong, Ruga is closer to the Koch and Rabha languages. Me'gam is a variety

¹ Burling (2003). 'The Tibeto-Burman Languages of Northeast India'.

² Burling (2004). 'The Language of the Modhupur Mandi (Garo) VOL I: Grammar'.

found to be spoken in the western most part of the Khasi Hills, to the east of the Garo Hills. Am'beng is spoken in the whole of the western parts of Garo Hills including Tura, which is the administrative headquarters of the district and the centre of education in Garo Hills and the greater part of the hills to the south of the central range. It is also spoken in Bangladesh. As mentioned earlier, A'we being the standard dialect is used as the medium of writing and instruction. All writings and translations like primers, school textbooks, hymns, religious texts and secular writings are written in this dialect. It is also used in religious places for delivering religious sermons, in public speeches etc.

Crystal (2003) says a dialect is a regionally or socially distinctive variety of language, identified by a particular set of words and grammatical structures. Any language with a reasonably large number of speakers will develop dialects, especially if there are geographical barriers separating groups of people from each other, or if there are divisions of social class. One dialect may predominate as the official or standard form of the language, and this is the variety which may come to be written down. Dialect is divided into two basic types- regional and social dialect. Dialects which identify where a person is from are called 'regional dialects' though other terms are used, e.g., 'local', 'territorial' and 'geographical'. Dialects which identify where a person is in terms of social scale are called 'social dialects' or 'class dialects'. 'Caste dialect' which can be classed under social dialect is found only in India (Chambers and Trudgill, 1980).

From the above mentioned dialects, only three dialects- A'we (northern and eastern parts of Garo Hills), Am'beng (West Garo Hills), and Atong (South Garo Hills) have been selected for the study. The dialects selected for the study are based on geographical/regional division of areas where they are spoken in India. The present study will attempt to provide a comparative lexical description of three dialects. Of the three dialects selected for the study, Atong is considered by scholars like Burling (2004) and Breugel (2008) to be less mutually intelligible with other dialects of Garo. Both the scholars are of the view that Atong is closer to Rabha and Koch.

II. LEXICAL COMPARISON OF A'WE, AMBENG AND ATONG

Differences in vocabulary are one aspect of dialect diversity which people notice readily and comment on quite frequently. They are certainly common enough as markers of the differences between geographical areas or regions--for instance the fact that "a carbonated soft drink" might be called pop in the inland North and the West of the United States, soda in the Northeast, tonic in Eastern New England, and cold drink, drink or dope in various parts of the South (Carver 1987:268). Or the fact that a person who was "tired or exhausted" might describe themselves as being all in if they were from the North or West, but wore out or give out if they were from the South (ibid.:273). With reference to Garo, lexical variations within the language are observed. Some of the examples are given below:

A'we	Am'beng	Atong	English
beʔen	anʔma	kan	body
ok	bikma	pipuk	stomach
burij	brij	balij	forest
meʔcik	meʔcik	gawi	girl

These lexical similarities and differences of the dialects undertaken for the study are discussed in detail under the following heads:

1.1 Body parts

Body parts include all the external and internal parts of the body as shown in Table 1. Under this, 12 lexical items have been selected to study for all the three dialects.

Table 1: Lexical items for Body parts

Serial No.	A'we	Am'beng	Atong	Gloss
1.	sk ^h o	sk ^h u	dikim	head
2.	giŋ ^h iŋ	giŋ ^h iŋ	nak ^h uŋ	nose
3.	greŋ	greŋ	kereŋ	bone
4.	t ^h aniŋ	t ^h aniŋ	runi	brain
5.	p ^h ak ^h re	p ^h ak ^h re	p ^h agoma	shoulder
6.	ʃak	ʃak	caʃku	hand
7.	ʃaksi	ʃaksi	caʃki	finger
8.	ʃaʃsk ^h u	ʃaʃsk ^h i	caʃku	knee
9.	p ^h et ^h op	p ^h it ^h op	p ^h ait ^h oba	cheek
10.	wagam	wagam	wakam	teeth
11.	k ^h udipe	k ^h udipok	k ^h adimbai	chin
12.	gandil	ganduri	ganduri	navel

The data under body parts shows that A'we and Am'beng have similar forms in most of the words whereas Atong seems to have quite different forms. The variation between the dialects is mostly at the phonological level. For examples in the given data the differences in terms of phonemes that occur between the dialects can be observed in case of vowels /o, e, u/ which are altered into /u, i, i/ in Am'beng. In case of Atong, they seem to have different lexemes. However, it does not apply for all the lexical items for instance in the word /ɟaksi/ 'finger' the phoneme /ɟ/ is changed to /c/ retaining the same meaning as /caksi/ and also /g/ in /gren/ is changed to /k/ in /kren/ which means bone. The phonological changes observed from the data can be shown as:

A'we	→	Am'beng	A'we	→	Atong
/o/	→	/u/	/ɟ/	→	/c/
/u/	→	/i/	/g/	→	/k/
/e/	→	/i/			

1.2 Kinship terms

Kinship terms are used to express personal relationships within the family, in both narrow and extended senses. Unlike English, other languages may have separate lexical items for male and female cousins, or for maternal and paternal aunts, or there may be no lexical contrast between brothers and cousins or between father and uncles (Crystal: 2003). Like other languages, Garo has contrastive lexical items for kinship terms. The lexical items for kinship terms are as follows:

Table 2: Lexical items for Kinship terms

Serial No	A'we	Am'beng	Atong	Gloss
13.	p ^h agipa	p ^h agipa	waɽgəpa	father
14.	maɽgipa	maɽgipa	ɟaoɽgəpa	mother
15.	se	se	bi ^h agəpa	husband
16.	ɟik	ɟik	gawigəpa	wife
17.	de ^h ant ^h e	di ^h ant ^h i	saɽbant ^h ei	son
18.	demeɽcik	dimiɽcik	saɽmincik	daughter
19.	ɟoŋ/dada	ɟoŋ/dada	ɟoŋ/dada	brother
20.	nono/abi	nono/abi	nono/abi	sister
21.	atchu	atchu	atchu	grandfather
22.	abo	abo	abu	grandmother
23.	suɽgipa	suɽgipa	saoɽgəpa	grandchild

From the data it is clear that A'we and Am'beng have the common lexical items. However, there is a variation in terms of vowel phonemes in Am'beng for instance /e/ is changed to /i/ as in /di^hant^hi/ 'son' and /dimiɽcik/ 'daughter' as seen in the given data. On the other hand, the variation that occurs in Atong is mostly in word forms as observed in examples no. 13 to 16. There are also words in Atong which are similar to the other two dialects as shown in the given examples 17 to 23. Garo has different lexical items for elder and younger ones for example in no.19 /ɟoŋ/ is addressed to the younger brother and /dada/ to an elder brother. It is similar in example no.20 as well where /nono/ refers to younger and /abi/ to elder sister.

1.3 Colour terms

Garo has few basic colour terms and are found to exist in all the three dialects which are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Colour terms lexical items

Serial No	A'we	Am'beng	Atong	Gloss
24.	gipok	gipok	pibok	white
25.	gisim	gisim	pinak	black
26.	gitcak	gitcak	pisak	red
27.	t ^h aŋsim	t ^h aŋsim	t ^h aŋsim	blue
28.	t ^h aŋsek	t ^h aŋsek	k ^h eŋcek	green
29.	rimit	rimit	rimit	yellow

The colour terms are similar both in A'we and Am'beng. There are no lexical differences between these two dialects whereas Atong has different lexemes for few lexical items. The differences are accounted in terms

of phonemes and also words. The variations in terms of words are shown in the examples no. 25 and 26. The variation in terms of phonemes can be shown as:

A'we	→	Atong
/g/	→	/p/
/p/	→	/b/
/t ^h /	→	/k ^h /

1.4 Numerals

These refer to the numbers that are found in all the three dialects.

Table 4: Lexical items for numerals

Serial No.	A'we	Ambeng	Atong	Gloss
30.	sa	sa	roŋsa	one
31.	gni	gni	roŋni	two
32.	gitt ^h am	gitt ^h am	roŋt ^h am	three
33.	bri	bri	bərei	four
34.	boŋa	boŋa	baŋa	five
35.	dok	dok	korok	six
36.	sni	sni	sene	seven
37.	cet	cet	catgik	eight
38.	sk ^h u	sk ^h u	cikk ^h ao	nine
39.	cikk ^h iŋ	cikk ^h iŋ	ceigik	ten

The numbers in A'we and Ambeng have the same word forms. It can be observed that Ambeng has totally adopted the number system of A'we which is the standardised form. In Atong, numbers are counted little differently and hence show different features from the two. On close observation, Atong seems to have undergone phonetic changes as in case of /bri/ 'four' where there is an addition/insertion of vowels /ə, e/ taking place in between the word and has become /bərei/ in Atong. This change is also noticed in example no. 36 where /e/ has been inserted in between the word and the final phoneme /i/ has been altered into /e/. The number six in A'we and Ambeng is /dok/, whereas in Atong a different word is used to express the term. Therefore, there is a variation in word forms as well.

1.5 Flora and fauna

These include the names of all the plants and animals present in the three dialects.

Table 5: Flora and Fauna lexical items

Serial	A'we	Ambeng	Atong	Gloss
40.	t ^h eʔgatcu	t ^h eʔgatcu	biʔcot	mango
41.	t ^h eʔbroŋ	t ^h iʔbroŋ	pancuŋ	jackfruit
42.	t ^h eʔrik	t ^h iʔrik	rekte	banana
43.	doʔbak	doʔbak	daoʔbak	bat
44.	doʔo	duʔu	daoʔ	bird
45.	matca	matca	matsa	tiger
46.	meŋgo	meŋgu	baira	cat
47.	matcu	matcu	maʔsu	cow
48.	doʔbok	duʔbok	purun	goat

A'we and Ambeng both have the common lexical items for flora and fauna. However, some phonological alternation occurs in Ambeng. The word /doʔo/ is changed to /duʔu/ 'bird', /doʔbak/ is changed to /duʔbak/ 'bat' and /meŋgo/ is changed to /meŋgu/ 'cat'. The back mid-high vowel /o/ is changed to back high vowel /u/. Differences in word forms are observed in Atong but only for few lexical items for instance /biʔcot/ 'mango', /pancuŋ/ 'jackfruit', /rekte/ 'banana', /baira/ 'cat' and /purun/ 'goat'. In example no. 45 the palatal affricate /c/ in A'we is changed to alveolar fricative /s/ in Atong and also in example no. 47 the alveolar stop /t/ gets deleted and is replaced with a glottal stop ʔ/.

1.6 Events and actions

Table 6: Lexical items for Events and actions

Serial No.	A'we	Am'beng	Atong	Gloss
49.	p ^h eʔa	p ^h iʔa	baeʔa	to break
50.	reʔba:	iʔba:	raeʔa	to come
51.	raʔa	raʔa	raʔak	to take
52.	doka	doka	toka	to hit
53.	reʔa	iʔaŋa	reʔeŋ	to go
54.	p ^h ua	p ^h ua	p ^h oa	to pierce
55.	gimaʔa	gimaʔa	maʔak	disappear
56.	ilʔeŋa	ilʔeŋa	guduka	to move

These are all phonetically related forms and their differences are seen in either vowels or consonants. Some phonological changes can be observed when Am'beng is compared with A'we. The initial consonant /r/ is deleted in Am'beng as seen in the examples no. 50 and 53. On comparing Atong with A'we, it is pretty clear that lexical items varies in terms of phonemes but for some lexical items there are different words used for the same entity (Examples no.55 and 56).

III. NATIVIZATION OF BORROWED WORDS

Borrowing is a common factor in Garo; this is possibly because the language is in continuous contact with other languages most probably with the Indo-Aryan language group. These borrowed words are then nativized and used by the Garos. A'we, Am'beng and Atong borrows words from other languages which undergo changes in the phonological structure.

- /gula:b/ → /golap/ 'rose'
- /gɔb^hi/ → /k^hobi/ 'cabbage'
- /g^həɖi/ → /k^hori/ 'watch'
- /rəŋ/ → /rɔŋ/ 'colour'

IV. LEXICAL DIFFERENCES

It shows the different lexical items in A'we, Am'beng and Atong for the same entity as shown below:

- A'we aram 'cloud'
- Am'beng ɟaŋ'a
- Atong raŋra

V. PHONOLOGICAL DIFFERENCES

It shows the lexical differences in phonemes. Some of them are as follows:

- | | | | | | |
|------|---|---------|------|---|-------|
| A'we | → | Am'beng | A'we | → | Atong |
| /o/ | | /u/ | /u/ | | /a/ |
| /e/ | | /i/ | /d/ | | /t/ |
| /u/ | | /i/ | /p/ | | /b/ |

VI. CONCLUSION

The study is limited to few selected lexical items and the analysis has been made based on those lexical items. From the data analysed it has been observed that the dialects mostly differ from each other in terms of phonemes. There are also lexical variations which are observed mainly in Atong. The study has been made to show how these dialects of the same language diverge or converge from each other. These dialects are mutually intelligible to each other but Atong among the three is more distinctive in nature. This work is a start to provide an insight on the differences and similarities that occur between dialects of Garo.

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