

CHAPTER: 2

**REVIEW OF
LITERATURE**

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At the outset, it must be mentioned that no comprehensive linguistic work on Uchai is available till date; and this present study is the first and the only work on the descriptive study of Uchai. Further, there is no original script of Uchai. The Uchai speakers either use English or Bengali script for literary purpose till today. Moreover, it needs to be stressed that Uchai has not been introduced for teaching in any government or private institution in Tripura.

The only book available on Uchai is Shyamlal Debbarma's *Sadharan Samikshar Alope Uchai* (1983), which is but a socio-economic study with passing references to the dialect.

The other books which have a passing reference to the tribe and their ethnicity and social-economic life are — R.H.S. Hutchinson's *An Account of the Chittagong Hill Tracts* (1906), S.B.K. Devvarman's *The Tribes of Tripura – A Dissertation* (1971), T.H. Lewin's *Wild Races of North Eastern India* (2007) and Rupak Debnath's *Exploring Highlanders of Tripura and Chittagong Hill Tracts* (2010).

Apart from the books mentioned above, there are only two articles and a glossary on Uchai, and that too by the same author, Keisuke Huziwara. Huziwara's "Usoi Tripura and Proto-Boro-Garo" (2009) is a discussion on the phonological features of the Uchai dialect in comparison to Proto-Boro-Garo phonology while in his "Usoi Tripura Basic Vocabulary" (2010), Huziwara gives us a short basic glossary of the Uchai dialect. Again, Huziwara's "Notes on Usoi Tripura Phonetics and Phonology" (2012) deals with different aspects of Uchai (or Usoi) phonetics and phonology where he describes the phonology of Uchai as a variety of Kokborok and chiefly deals with the variety as spoken in the Chittagong Hill Tract. The paper highlights on Uchai consonant and vowel contrasts and analyses and describes Uchai syllable structure and tone as well.

There are, however, several grammar books on Kokborok language, such as Daulat Ahmed's, M. M. Dahar's and Radhamohan Thakur's. Nonetheless, the earliest specimen of Kokborok vocabulary, albeit a short, was recorded by Buchanan in 1798, followed by Lewin in 1869 and Campbell in 1874. Anderson's list of Tippera words appeared a decade later in 1885. But a proper linguistic account on Kokborok occurs as late as in Grierson's *Linguistic Survey of India*, Vol. 3 (1904).

Mention must be made of S.K. Chakraborty's *A Study of Tipra Language* (1981), P Dhar's *Kakbarak Surungma: A Grammar of Spoken Kakbarak* (1983) and S.K. Chaudhuri's *Learn Kokborok Teach Kokborok*

(2004) which are all but general studies on Kokborok language. To this must be added Joseph and Burling's *The Comparative Phonology of the Boro-Garo Languages* (2006), which is a comparative study on the phonological process and the correspondence on four Boro-Garo languages, viz. Tiwa, Boro, Garo and Rabha.

P.P. Karapurkar's *Kokborok Grammar* (1976) and F. Jacquesson's *A Kokborok Grammar* (2008) need a special mention because of their comprehensive descriptive study on Kokborok language.

Moreover, Kumud Kundu Choudhury of Tripura has carried out commendable philological studies on Kokborok language, especially the Sadar South Dialect. Some of his well acknowledged books on Kokborok language are *Kokborok – A Promising Tribal Language of North-East India* (2007), *Kokborok Bhāsāshikshar Āsar* (2008) and *Kokborok Dhanibichār* (2010).

To all these must be added Rupak Debnath's *Kokborok: Language Origin and Development* (2014), a commendable investigative work on the origin and development of Kokborok where through elaborate parallels and comparative study the author confirms the linguistic affinities that Kokborok shares not only with the modern Bodo-Garo-Koch languages but also with several languages of a richly diversified Tibeto-Burman sub-family of the Sino-Tibetan Languages.

Apart from the books and articles mentioned above, a few published dictionaries on Kokborok and Bru are also available. Binoy Debbarma's *Anglo-Kokborok Dictionary* (1996) and *Concise Kokborok–English–Bengali Dictionary* (2001) and Gitty Kumar Reang's, *Kau Bru Abhidhan* (2007) have been consulted upon to comprehend Uchai vocabulary against Kokborok and Bru.

But as far as detailed linguistic study on Uchai is concerned, the field lies untrodden. To this lacking must be added the absence of extensive fieldwork and access to reliable field-data which form the core constitution of the present research.

2.2 SCOPE AND ORIENTATION OF THE STUDY

The present study makes an attempt to examine the linguistic structure of Uchai as spoken in Tripura with respect to phonology, morphology and syntax. Thus, the main objective of the study is to describe Uchai from phonological, morphological and syntactical point of view. The study of Uchai is not only the first step in the direction of codification of the language, but also is a basic material for teaching and learning of the language. Moreover, it aspires to provide materials for the typological and areal comparison for languages and for studies of language universals.

However, the broad objectives to be achieved in course of the research are to formulate the phonological, morphological and syntactic structures of

Uchai and to enquire afresh into linguistic as well as a descriptive study of Uchai as spoken today by the native speakers. Moreover, the study gleans into the diverse changes that had gone into Uchai in the course of social changes experienced by the native speakers of the language.

2.3 DATA AND METHODOLOGY

In analysing the linguistic process at work, both at synchronic and diachronic levels, the present study has been methodically oriented through the dimensions of space, time, and acceptance. The universe of the research work chiefly constitutes Tripura, with specific focus on the areas wherein the Uchai speakers are located. In terms of the time-frame of the publications consulted in the form of secondary data, the period covered under the bibliographic material extends from 1798 to 2014. For citation and glossing, *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, Sixth Edition* (2010) and *The Leipzig Glossing Rules* (2008) have been followed respectively.

The ethno-historical past of the Uchai speakers has been inferred from Secondary Data pertaining to what is available on them as also on other ethnic groups with whom they had ethnic connection in the past or had interacted with them in melting-pot situation. Subject-wise, books and papers consulted in course of the work are of the following types:

(i) Ethnological narratives providing details of ethnic origins and nomenclatures, labels of identity and contrast, man and ecology relationship, aspects of domestic and village life, and the forms of popular beliefs;

(ii) Linguistic accounts exploring, albeit in rudimentary forms, the grammatical and glossarial aspects of Uchai against broader features of Kokborok and Bru; and

(iii) Published and unpublished records, both data and information, available at government office.

The data for the present work is largely based on the primary source, as there is hardly any written material available on Uchai; therefore, primary data has been the most resourceful for this linguistic study. For the purpose of understanding the way in which the native speakers use the language, considerable time has been spent on field in several trips to different Uchai villages from 2009 to 2015 and the informants belonged to different age groups and sex. The methodology may be visualised against the following outlines:

(i) ‘Participant Observation’ in which ‘direct’ and ‘consented’ interaction with Uchai speakers have been carried out for an extended period stretching over several months, living with them and noting the way in which their language is used in everyday communication; in addition to that, brief periods were spent with other Kokborok and Bru speakers.

(ii) ‘Structured Observation’ has been particularly preferred in obtaining the linguistic data while for ethnic information, ‘Unstructured Observation’ was adopted by taking field-notes from proper informants and verifying the same notes from other informants of the same cultural community living in the same village or in different villages.

(iii) ‘Qualitative Observational’ method was followed in carrying out field-research by going out to the field and observing the linguistic group within their familiar cultural and ecological setting, and by taking the permission of ‘gatekeepers’ or persons in charge of the village community or cultural subgroup, collecting information and finally analysing the obtained field-data to the formulation of hypothesis.

No less importantly, the Rights-based approach as envisaged by the Social Research Association of Great Britain (SRAGB) has been adopted and respect for informants and other individuals providing information was thoroughly maintained. At no point, unwilling informants were compelled to provide information. Besides, to ensure commitment and motivation of informants, they were familiarised with the research background and the significance of the study.

Information obtained from a particular informant was not presumed to be automatically acceptable. Rather, the collected data had been verified and cross-checked from other informants living in the same village or in another village, whichever was necessary. Nonetheless, data had also been collected on

gender-basis to see whether there were any marked differences of information on the basis of sex.

As mentioned earlier, the source of linguistic data for this study was a number of informants belonging to different age groups, occupation, and sex. It needs to be mentioned that some of the informants were multilingual having knowledge of English, Hindi, Bengali, Kokborok, Bru and above all, their mother tongue, Uchai whereas the others were purely bilingual either knowing Bengali and their mother tongue or Kokborok and their mother tongue or Bru and their mother tongue. The informants, who were directly and actively associated with this work are named below:

1. Rev. Zotham Uchoi (41 yrs)
2. Mr. Manik Uchoi (42 yrs)
3. Mr. Niranjay Uchoi (64 yrs)
4. Mr. Thanda Uchoi (62 yrs)
5. Mrs. Ranapoti Uchoi (59 yrs)
6. Mr. Pranab Uchoi (58 yrs)
7. Mr. Sambarai Uchoi (72 yrs)
8. Mr. Sajaram Uchoi (35 yrs)
9. Mrs. Nayami Uchoi (47 yrs)
10. Mrs. Sandhyati Uchoi (30 yrs)
11. Ms. Usha Uchoi (28 yrs)
12. Ms. Salina Uchoi (23 yrs)
13. Mr. Surjya Uchoi (45 yrs)

14. Mr. Basuki Uchoi (48 yrs)
15. Mr. Julius Uchoi (26 yrs)
16. Mr. Bikash Uchoi (32 yrs)

The informants named above have experiences in different fields and terminology and they belong to different Uchai-dominated villages of Tripura. The informants were asked to utter words and sentences and those were recorded to transcribe the lexical items and understand the tonal pattern of Uchai. However, apart from the above mentioned informants, a number of other native speakers of Uchai, Kokborok and Bru from different occupation and areas in Tripura helped to provide valuable data to carry out this present research work.

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