

Chapter- 1

Introduction

1.1. Language and people

The Toto is a one of the minor tribes of West Bengal having its distinct language, custom and ethnic identity. Toto is the name of the language and the community that speak the language. The term *Toto* itself is derived from the Tibetan word *tɔdbo* means ‘dweller of high altitude mountains’ and later *tɔdbo* > *toto*. Ethnically Totos are Mongloids and their language belongs to Tibeto-Burman family of languages. Their language is still oral and they have no script of their own. The status of their language is very negligible they received less attention from the government. Their language is not taught in the schools of Jalpaiguri. Toto cultural dance, songs, or any other cultural events are not telecast in the Jalpaiguri Durdarshan Kendra. In such situation, one anonymous Toto poet says in his songs.

Ka iuba yeko ədo ka ʒeŋ mi, ka iuwa ka ʒeʒeŋ mi

Ye nanaiso kuŋ əta aʒabi ye pamsa lemi.....

“Our language Toto is our heart, it is very much pleasant to the ear.

It is the language that our ancestors brought.....”

1.2. Geographical and demographic distribution

The speakers of Toto are found mainly in the small tiny Himalayas hamlet located in Madarihat police station under Alipurduar sub-division of Jalpaiguri District of West Bengal. The village is situated at the foothills of the Bhutan-Himalayas along the Indo-Bhutan border in Indian territory. The Toto tribe of Bengal reside in this village. They have been designed as six underdeveloped tribes of West Bengal (Majumdar 1991). The Totopara is sub-divided into six small villages namely (i) Mondalgaon (ii) Dumsigaon (iii) Pujagaon (iv) Subagaon (v) Ponchayetgaon and (vi) Mitrangaon. However, the division of villages shows no dialectal variation of Toto. All the villages are situated very near to each other and they are mutually intelligible. As per the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order, 1950, the following were listed as scheduled tribes in West Bengal: 1. Asur, 2. Baiga, 3. Badia, Bediya, 4. Bhumji, 5. Bhutia, Sherpa, **Toto**, Dukpa, Kogatay, Tibetan, Yolmo, 6. Birhor, 7. Birjia, 8. Chakma, 9. Chero, 10. Chik Baraik, 11. Garo, 12. Gond, 13. Gorait, 14. Hajang, 15. Ho, 16. Karmali, 17. Kharwar, 18. Khond, 19. Kisan, 20. Kora, 21. Korwa, 22. Lepcha, 23. Lodha, Kheria, Kharia, 24. Lohara, Lohra, 25. Magh, 26. Mahali, 27. Mahli, 28. Mal Pahariya, 29. Mech, 30. Mru, 31. Munda, 32. Nagesia, 33. Oraon, 34. Parhaiya, 35. Rabha, 36. Santal, 37. Sauria Paharia, 38. Savar, 39. Limbu (Subba) and 40. Tamang.

According to Sub-divisional Tribal Welfare Office 2011, the total population of Toto speakers in the State of West Bengal was 1389. Table 1 given below shows the growth of population from 1951-2011.

Year	No.of Houses	Male	Female	Total
1951	69	162	160	321
1961	85	423	193	616
1971	96	332	318	650
1981	135	357	349	706
1991	141	471	457	928
2001	238	610	565	1175
2011	306	739	650	1389

Table 1: growth of Toto population from 1951-2011

1.3. Linguistic affiliation

According to G.A Grierson (1901), Linguistics Survey of India, Volume-III, Part-I, Toto language belong to a Himalayan Subgroup of the Tibeto-Burman Language family.

Robert Shafer (1974) has made totally different classification of Sino-Tibetan languages than from other authors. He divides Tibeto-Burman into four main groups: Bodic, Baric, Burmic and Karenic. According to Shafer, Toto belongs to the Jalpaiguri group of the Barish Section within the Baric Subdivision of Sino-Tibetan. The closest linguistics relatives of Toto are Lepcha (Rong), Newar, Magar and Gurung.

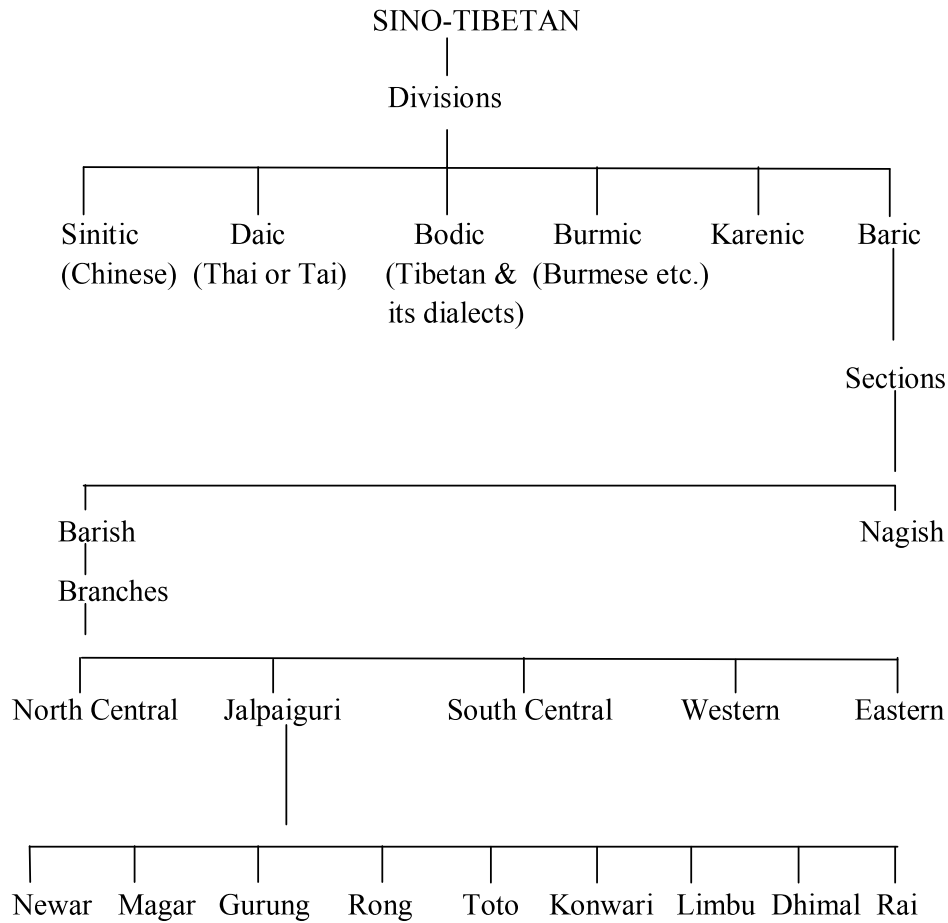


Figure 1 Classification of the Sino-Tibetan Language Family (Robert Shafer, 1966-1974)

Dr I.J.S. Taraporewala (1978) has shown in a tree diagram of Tibeto-Burman language family in which the Toto language was placed under the group of Non- pronominalised Tibeto-Himalayan dialect and its first predecessor is Lepcha of Sikim. Further, Bishnu (2012) has mentioned that Toto language is one of them or a mixture of them. Not only in tongue, the Totos resembles in their dress and behavior with the Lokhe or Bhutanese. But it can be confidently said that the Toto speech retained some distinguishable characteristics of the Himalayan or Tibetan group of dialects. According to

the above discussion the origin of the Toto language may be shown in the following diagram.

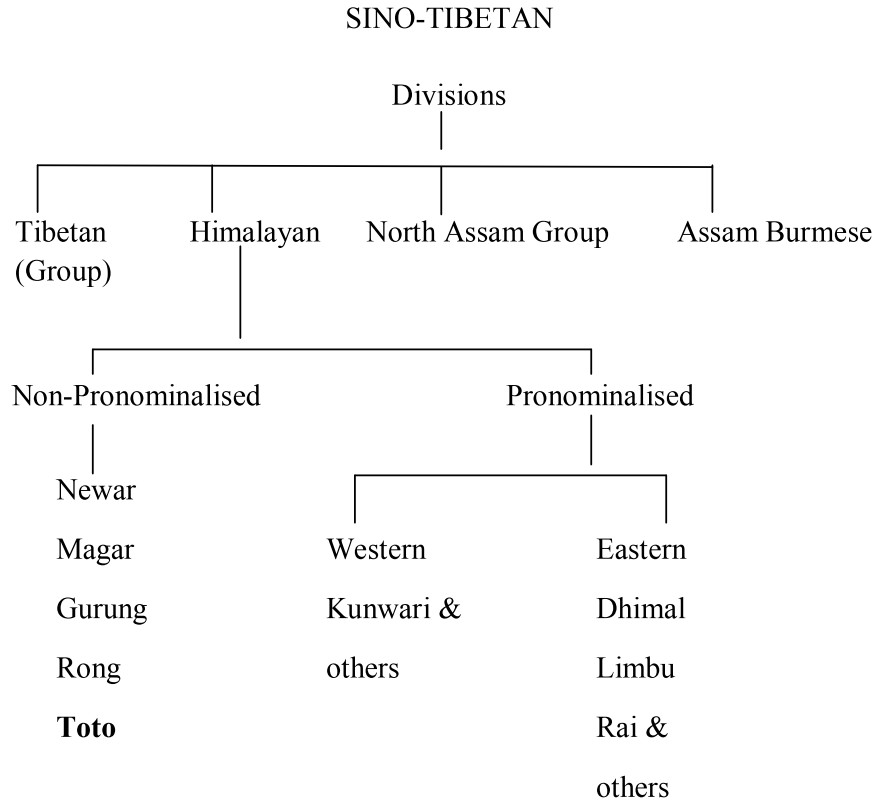


Fig-2 Taraporewale's classification of Non- pronominalised Tibeto Himalayan dialects

1.4. Origin and Migration

The Toto folktales tell us that the Supreme Lord has created human beings into this world. The Supreme God made a safe shelter for human beings and kept them inside the cave. Mazumdar (1991) has mentioned that Toto people are not aware of their migration in Totopara. The oldest persons did not know how many days back it happened. The Totos used to reside at Bhutan hills at that time. It was very hard days for the Totos. They were captured by the Bhutanese army and were taken as slave for a long time. But some of them could escape and stayed scattered elsewhere without any trace.

Before that incident the Totos were a big nation too. There after the young Totos were recruited as a porters for the king's army. It was a more troubled period for the Totos. A big war broke out between the Bhutia king and the king of the western country. The army of the Bhutan king started moving towards the west. The Totos had to follow them carry big loads on their bag. They passed through the dense forests and lofty hills. They crossed the turbulent rivers. Yet that tedious journey was an unending one. In this way after walking for seven days, the convoy reached the west bank of 'Ama-chu' (river Torsha) and camp there for the night. After taking their milk the army personal went to the bed and due to the days hard toil they were dog tired and fell asleep within a short time. The night was pitch dark. The Totos also lay down but they did not sleep. At a certain time they get ready with the signal of their headman silently. Their gang was taking rest by the side of the hill slope. They stealthly slipped away through the slope with their load on their back towards the foot of the hill. Within a short time they reached the sand bed of river Torsha. They were 'I-kai' (one score) in number. They walk through out the night. In the early morning before the sunrise they took shelter in the dense forest of Tading hill. From the hiding place they found out the present village of Totopara. The researcher tried to know since when they are living in Totopara they replied since seven generations.

1.5. Script and Literature

It is well known fact that the tribal people of North-East India do not have their own script. Likewise, Toto do not have their own script to write their language. They used Bengla script to write their language with some modifications. It is also observed that younger generations are used to learn Bengla script as it is taught in schools under the government of West Bengal. Like many other Tibeto-Burman languages, Toto has tonal distinctions. However the tonal distinction is not reflected in their present writing system.

Moreover, no any attempt has also been made to devise a phonemic based writing system where tone can be marked orthographically. Consequently, the preparation of Toto writing system according to the phonological structure of the language is necessary for semantic interpretation of the language at large.

As many other tribal people of West Bengal, there is no healthy written literature in Toto, but they have a rich oral literature which has not been recorded or documented in proper way. It is interesting to note that most of the younger generations of Toto are not well aware of their heritage oral literature in the form of folk songs, folk tales, oral narratives etc., as it plays a crucial role to enhance their literature in great extend. Moreover, Toto oral literature compose of the beautiful depiction of Toto society in which it flourished such as the ways of life, customs, institutions, joys, sorrows etc. which are inherited from their forefathers. Interestingly, this beautiful unwritten, unexplored literature has been orally transmitted from generation to generation, but in recent times some scholars have brought out some of the essence of Toto oral literature in their publications.

1.6. Social and Economic life

The society of Toto community is patriarchal. The man is the head of the family and he has the most power of making decisions concerning family matters. However, women are also respected in the society. The elder members of the society and married couples are higher on the social hierarchy than unmarried boys and girls. A burst of joy spread over the village when a baby is born among the Totos. But no religious functions are observed. After the birth of the new born baby some drops of local wine is sprinkled on its mouth. During the naming ceremony a grass made rope is fasten in the hand of baby so that baby will be protected from the evil eyes. The Toto dwelling houses are called Nako Sha. They make their houses

which are made up of wood, bamboo, clay, elephant grass, hay, etc. There are two kinds of village councils viz: (i) Religious Council and (ii) Secular Administration council. The head of the religious council is called Kaji and the secular head is Mandal. It is to be noted that both the post are hereditary. But if there is provision if anyone is eligible he can be elected to these posts. Kaji works on the religious matter. He performs his duty with the help of village elders where as Mondal works on land dispute, theft, social crime etc. The Totos are non-vegetarians. They take meat and fish in addition to vegetables and pulses. Their staple food is rice. Rice beer is indispensable on all ceremonies and drinking of rice beer called 'IU' in Toto rice beer is not prohibited. Smoking of cigarettes and Bidis are very popular. They also smoke hukkah generally by the men and women-folks, Tea is a popular drink among them. By occupation, Totos are agriculturist and their traditional occupation is cultivation. But when they have migrated in the Totopara, they gave up their jhuming cultivation but at present they are doing shifting cultivation. Their traditional subsidiary occupations are piggery and cattle rearing. At present some of them are also employed in Government jobs in Jalpaiguri town. Toto women are expert in weaving.

1.7. Religion and Festival

They have faith that birth and death of an individual is related to sun. They believe that an individual take birth from where the sun rises. They worship nature as well as many deities of Hindu. In their religion they worship rivers, sky, forest, hills etc. The chief deity among Tato is *Ispha*. To the outsiders the chief deity is known as *Mahakal*. The preist *Kaji* performs all sort of religious activities. It is found that *Mahakal* or *Ispha* is represented by two drums. One drum is represented as female and another is male. The female drum is placed in the east while male is in the west. If any non-Toto or beats

it then he/she has to go through *Sangailami* (a fine). They perform the puja of goddess Mahakali. A part from the *Ispha*, they also observe two important rituals like *Ongchu* in the 14th day of the darker half of the month of the sarban (July-August). This festival is celebrated in a very joyous way and all the Toto family participate and contribute for the celebration and well being of the Toto family. Another ritual is known as *Mayu* (worship of orange) which is done in the month of August-September. It is held after the end of *Ongchu* festival where *iu* 'local wine' rice and flesh is served. This is a deity of orange.

1.8 Education

The Toto people understand the privilege of education in modern era particularly the mother tongue education. Due to non-availability of schooling in their mother tongue, Toto people used to educate their children in Bengali medium schools irrespective of their economic condition. However, very few children had their schooling in English medium. It is important to note that Toto language has not been introduced as a medium of instruction or as a subject in the schools or institutions. Furthermore, it can also be mentioned that Toto people are well aware of education. Consequently, some of the Totos are government employees and sustained their life different from their early age.

1.9. Multilingualism

Toto people can speak Nepali and Hindi other than their mother tongue. Interestingly most of the educated people can also speak little bit of English one of the national co-official language of India. It is also important to note that the West Bengal is a multi-lingual, multi-ethnic and multi-cultural state and Bengali is the dominant language in their palce. Therefore, almost all the Toto tribes use Bengali in their inter-ethnic communication. It is also to be

mentioned here that they speak Bengali, to some extent Nepali and Hindi as a link language with the Non-Totos but they learn Bengali in the school domain only. So their language is highly influenced by the Bengali language. It is also worth mentioning here that multilingualism is on the upsurge in Toto community due to influence of the dominant languages. It is true that linguistic minorities, in particular, have developed a stable multilingualism as a normal way of life as it is happened in the case of Toto.

1.10. Language maintenance

In the words of Fasold (1984), “Language maintenance is a sociolinguistic factor when a speech community collectively decides to continue to use the language that they traditionally used”. Language maintenance is not only crucial but also a challenging task for each and every community for its distinct linguistic and ethnic identity. However, for a minority community like Toto, home seems to be the main source for language maintenance. Undoubtedly, all Toto reported that they speak Toto at home and encouraged their children to use the language in their home domain. It may be the reason that they have positive attitude towards their language and used as a tools for identifying themselves as a distinct ethnic community. However, Toto use Bengali outside the home domains with non-Toto friends, and professional like doctor, nurse, pharmacists, bus driver, conductor, etc.

Language attitude is another factor which can also play a decisive role in language maintenance. It is true that if a community has positive attitude towards their mother tongue, this will lead to language maintenance. This is true in case of Toto spoken in Totopara. It is also important to note that the inter-caste marriage is not permitted in their society only to maintain their language.

1.11 Toto an Endangered Language

Toto is a minor or endangered language of North Eastern India. If we see the position of Toto in this 21st century or if we specify more in the subject just crossing 67 years of Indian independence.

(i) Like many other tribal people, Toto do not have their indigenous script and no attempt has made to devise the orthography of this language by governmental or non-governmental agencies.

(ii) There is no written literature; their literature remains oral till date.

(iii) No dictionary, no proper grammar, word book, primer in the language which can be used in the formal education system.

(iv) Lack of formal education in the language, children of this language had their schooling in English.

(v) There is no printed media in the language.

(vi) There is no radio or television programme in the language.

(vii) The younger generation of Toto people disuse lexical items related to indigenous flora-fauna including medicinal plants, festivals, games, food habits, counting systems, name of the season, name of the week, craftsmanship, fishing, hunting, etc.

(vii) Discontinuance of their old age traditional/cultural practices in the form of folk songs, folk dances, proverbs, folk medication, fishing, hunting, craftsmanship, games and political system.

(viii) Very small size of speakers.

(ix) Inter-community marriage.

(x) Liberal use of loan words in their day to day life.

(xi) Toto is highly influenced by the dominant language Bengali.

1.12 Methodology

The fieldwork of the present work has been carried out in different parts of the Totopara of Jalpaiguri district of West Bengal where the native speakers of the language are being concentrated. The *Lingua Descriptive Studies: Questionnaire* (Comrie & Smith, 1977) has been used for collecting data; however the mode of collecting data for the present work was not always that of the *Questionnaire*. A comprehensive list of words, phrases, and sentences of my own have also been made in English/Bengali and Toto equivalents have been elicited from the native speakers. The data for the present study is based on the primary source. However, secondary materials like books, journals and articles etc. are also used. The primary method of data collection was direct elicitation and group discussion. The speech data were collected and recorded from the native speakers of Toto from both the sex groups i.e., male and female for closer study.

The present work provides the structural description of Toto language spoken in Totopara of Jalpaiguri District of West Bengal in the light of descriptive framework.