

North-East India as a linguistic area*

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1. Introduction

1.1 Language situation in the northeastern part of India

The northeastern part of India comprises the seven sister states of Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur, Nagaland, Tripura, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh. According to the 1971 census there are about 220 languages spoken in these states, belonging mainly to three language families, namely Indo-European, Sino-Tibetan and Austric. Indo-European is represented by Asamiya, Sino-Tibetan is represented by the Tibeto-Burman languages of Boro, Karbi, Garo, Mising, Rabha, Dimasa, Kachari, Tiwa, Deuri etc, and Tai represented by a few dialects of Tai-Ahom, Tai-Phake, Tai-Khamyang, Tai-Turung, Tai-Aiton and Tai-Khamti.

The sole representative of the Austric family is Khasi (Kakati 1941:32) and it is the major language spoken in the state of Meghalaya in which such minor languages as Asamiya and Garo are spoken.

Tibeto-Burman Meitei is the official language of Manipur, where Tangkhul-Naga of the same group is also spoken. Different Tibeto-Burman languages like Ao, Angami, Sema, Lotha, Konyak, Dzemi, etc. are spoken in Nagaland. Asamiya is also used in certain parts of Nagaland.

Tibeto-Burman Kak-borak, sometimes also called Tripuri, and Bangla are the main languages of Tripura.

Mizo and Hmar of the Tibeto Burman group are the major languages spoken in Mizoram.

In Arunachal Pradesh all the major languages spoken belong to the Tibeto-Burman group, namely, Hrusso, Tanee, Nisi, Adi, Abor, Nocte, Apatani, Misimi, Galong, etc.

It is interesting to note here that Asamiya has been serving almost as a *lingua franca* among many speech communities mentioned for the last couple of centuries. It is being used for inter-language and also for inter-dialect communication between

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the various speech groups. In some cases the creation of pidgins has also been noticed. For example, the various mutually unintelligible Naga dialects use the Naga pidgin in Nagaland, where the source language is Asamiya. In Arunachal Pradesh it has been observed that a similar situation prevails where Arunachalese, a pidgin where the source language is Asamiya, is being used like the Naga pidgin for both inter-language and inter-dialect communication.

The Tibeto Burman tribes came through Burma and entered the hills and valleys of Assam in about 1000 B.C. They gradually encroached upon the Austric settlers who have been settling here since 2000 to 2500 B.C. and forced most of them to take refuge in mountainous homes. That was how the Khasis thrived in their mountainous homes high on the hills of Meghalaya.

Like any other Aryan language, Asamiya had its roots in the Apabhramsa dialects developed from Magadhi Prakrit of the eastern group of Sanskritic languages. The Kamarupa variety of the Apabhramsa dialects made its way into Assam and eventually Asamiya was created. That Asamiya came into existence in Assam at a very early date can be gauged from a reference by Xuan-Zang, a Chinese traveller who visited Assam in 643 A.D. The copper plate inscriptions of the rulers of Kamarupa or Assam from the 5th through 13 century A.D. (written in Sanskrit) and the stone inscriptions at Umachal dating back to the 5th century A.D. confirm such an observation.

Early in the 13th century, a section of the Mao branch of the Tai race entered Assam under the leadership of Chao-lung Shu-ka-pha and conquered it and ruled till the British annexed erstwhile Assam in 1826. These people came to be known as Ahoms and their language Ahom or more properly Tai-Ahom. Dr. B.K. Kakati suggests that the name Assam pronounced /OxOm/ has its roots with the Ahoms who were so called, /OxOmO/ meaning unequalled by the vanquished local people. For several centuries the Ahom language continued as their mother tongue in which works on various subjects such as history,² astrology, religion and politics were produced. Many of these works are still preserved by certain families. But gradually the Ahoms converged with the local OxO-mias (the Assamese) and there was almost a total shift of language from Ahom to Assamese. Today the Tai-Ahom language is used only by the Mawsams, Mawhungs and Maw-plangs (Deodhai Mawhun and Bailung), the three priestly Ahom classes, for religious purposes only.³ The shift of Ahom to Asamiya undoubtedly had a remarkable impact on the Asamiya language structure.

Large-scale diffusion of linguistic innovations has been taking place between Asamiya, the Sino-Tibetan languages, and Khasi in this area for a very long time, which has resulted in many common linguistic features binding all these languages in a common thread even though they are not related genetically. This is a direct result of linguistic innovations originating in one language spreading to neighboring varieties through the medium of bilingual speakers. The common structural features shared by these languages of this area are not found in any

²The word for history in Asamiya is 'buranji' which has been borrowed from Ahom.

³A few Tai dialects are reported to be in use in East-Assam in the Dibrugarh district. However heavy carry-over from Asamiya is evident. These Tai dialects are Tai-Khamti, Tai-Phake, Tai-Aitong, Tai-Khamyang and Tai-Turung. Except for Tai-Ahom, all these dialects have maintained their own linguistic status.

language in the rest of the country. Xuan-Zang observed as early as in 643 A.D. that the languages spoken here differed from that of mid-India.

1.2 Language profile of India

Barring the northeast, India is inhabited by a large population who speak languages belonging to three major families: **Indo-Aryan** (a sub-family of Indo-European) represented by Hindi, Marathi, Bangla, Oriya, Gujarati, Maithili, etc.; **Dravidian**: Tamil, Telegu, Malayalam, Kannada, etc.; and **Munda**: Sora, Santhali, Malto, Kharia, etc. Co-existence over time has resulted in large-scale diffusion of linguistic features across genetic boundaries resulting in an Indo-Aryanization of Dravidian languages (Sridhar 1975) and Dravidianization of Indo-Aryan languages (Gumperz and Wilson 1971, Nadkarni 1975, Pandit 1972). Significant borrowings of linguistic features from Munda into the other two families and vice-versa are also evident (Burrow 1955).

2. Common linguistic characteristics of the languages of northeast India

In the following sections I describe the salient linguistic features which are peculiar to this area and distinguish it from the greater Indian linguistic area.

2.1 Phonological features

(a) As Emeneau has observed, 'Most of the languages of India, of no matter which major family, have a set of retroflexes, in contrast with dentals. The retroflexes include stops, nasals, fricatives, laterals, trills and flaps. This is an essentially Dravidian feature which has crept into all Indo-Aryan and Munda languages marked by Barushaski in Kashmir'.⁴ In other words, it forms a solid bloc characterized by this phonological feature. However, the northeastern part of India is totally out of this bloc because not a single language, irrespective of family, has contrasts between dental and retroflex sounds, a unique feature of the languages here is a total absence of any retroflex sounds. Instead the languages here have a whole series of dental or alveolar sounds which include oral and nasal stops, fricatives, laterals, approximants, flaps and trills.⁵ This absence of retroflex sounds and the presence of alveolar or dental sounds are features typical of the northeast Indian languages.

(b) Another striking phonological feature shared by all the languages of the northeast, is the use of velar nasal /ŋ/. Extensive use of this sound at all positions in a word is seen in all the languages of the North-East,⁶ and the way /ŋ/ is pronounced here clearly marks this area different from the rest of the mainland. It is interesting to observe that in all the languages of northeastern India /ŋ/ is always pronounced singly but in the rest of the country speakers of any language attach a homorganic sound /g/ immediately after /ŋ/, and it is pronounced simultaneously. Thus /ŋ/ is realised as /ŋg/. For example, certain important place names of the North-East like

⁴See Emeneau (1954 a)

⁵For more details see Grierson, *Indian Antiquary* (supplement, 1933, October, P-156).

⁶In Asamiya it has some limitation on its occurrence as it never occurs word-initially.

Rangiya, Pengeri, Dhing, are pronounced by speakers here as /ronja/, /peŋeri/ and /dhiŋ/, respectively, but contrary to this any language speaker from the mainland will pronounce them as /rongia/ /peŋgeri/ and /dhiŋg/ etc. This is a common hurdle faced by all language speakers learning any language belonging to the mainland and vice-versa. Moreover, there is a limitation of occurrences of /ŋ/ in a majority of Indian languages. This is a distinct Sino-Tibetan feature creeping into all the languages of this area because it is observed that for almost any Sino-Tibetan language in South-East Asia /ŋ/ is a very common sound.

(c) The palatal sounds of underlying Sanskrit have attained different sound values in different Indo-Aryan varieties. For instance, in Bangla they have become palatal affricates, in Marathi they have become dento-palatal affricates, but in Asamiya these sounds were lost due to the impact of neighboring languages, where the alveolars or the dentals are the most dominant.

Regarding the fricatives, one can postulate that /s, z, h/ occur in all languages irrespective of any family in the northeast. However in Asamiya only an extra fricative /x/⁷ is noticed.

2.2 Grammatical features

(a) Personal deictics or markers: The use of personal markers in regard to the use of various kinship terms in reference to the age and rank of both the speaker and listener, is a feature which separates the northeastern languages of India from all other languages in the rest of the country. However, a few languages belonging to the Munda group in Central India, particularly Santhali, have somewhat similar systems. G.A. Grierson in modern *Indo-Aryan Vernaculars* (p.75) has mentioned this aspect, particularly in Boro and a few other Tibeto-Burman languages. According to Dr. Banikanta Kakati, this is an Austric feature which has influenced all the other languages of this area. This seems possible because the distant Munda language of Santhali may have preserved this system, while the others might have lost it due to the Indo-Aryan and Dravidian impact where no traces of such a system are seen.

The following examples from Asamiya, Khasi (Austric) and a few Tibeto-Burman languages show such use of personal markers.

Asamiya (Indo-Aryan)	Khasi (Austric)	Meitei	Boro	Mising
/tumar deuta ra/ (your+father+marker)		/nOm gin opa/ (your+marker+father)		/no KKou ani/ (my+marker +mother)
	/la zoŋ phupa/ (your+marker +father)		/naŋ ni aøa/ (your+marker +father)	

⁷The voiceless velar fricative /x/ is a distinct characteristic of Asamiya which is not to be found in any language in the entire country. It is similar to the velar sound in German, of Europe. It may be an Indo-European feature which has been preserved by Asamiya. It is a very important phoneme in the language.

The differences between Asamiya and a majority of Tibeto-Burman languages and Khasi as shown above are that in Asamiya the marker is attached after the noun, but in the rest it occurs before the noun. However, it is worth mentioning here that in a few Tibeto-Burman languages, like Garo and Rabha, such markers are attached after the noun as in Asamiya.

GARO:

phag + gi + pa
my + father + marker

RABHA:

ba + p^ha + bra
my + father + marker

(b) Negativization process: The process of negation of verbs in Asamiya is another feature which clearly demarcates it from the rest of the sister new Indo-Aryan languages and other Dravidian languages. In Asamiya /n/ is attached to the verb followed by a vowel which is the exact copy of the vowel of the first syllable of the verb, as in:

- (i) /na lage/ 'do not want' (1st, 2nd, 3rd, person)
- (ii) /ni likhu/ 'will not write' (1st person)
- (iii) /nukutu/ 'will not nibble' (1st person)
- (iv) /nEIEkhE/ 'does not write' (3rd person)
- (v) /nOKOrO/ 'do not do' (2nd person)

Where the various negative markers are (i) /na/, (ii) /ni/, (iii) /nu/, (iv) /nE/ and (v) /nO/

A similar system is also observed in Tai-Ahom where the negative marker is /m/ and it is prefixed to various verbs, as in the verbs /kin/ in Tai-Ahom which means 'to eat', and /mikin/ which means 'not eat'.

Khasi also has a more or less similar system where the negative marker is /em/. Whenever it is prefixed to a verb negativisation occurs, as in:

- | | | | | | |
|-------|-----------|--------------|---|---------|----------------|
| /bam/ | 'to eat' | (1st person) | - | /embam/ | 'will not eat' |
| /let/ | 'to go' | (1st person) | - | /emlet/ | 'will not go' |
| /dOn/ | 'to have' | (1st person) | - | /emdOn/ | 'dонт'have' |

This feature of prefixing the negative marker seems to be an influence from Khasi, but it has undergone a slight change in its use as is observed in the examples from Asamiya and Ahom. Even Rabhamese, a variety of Rabha spoken in West Assam bordering the Khasi hills, is reported to have a similar system.

(c) The use of plural suffixes in all the languages spoken in the northeast is another feature which marks them as different from a majority of Pan-Indian languages. In Asamiya, for instance, all the bound forms such as /hot/, /bur/, /bilak/, /mokha/, /zak/, /Xokol/, etc. denote plurality and are suffixed to a noun or a pronoun. Boro and Garo have /bur/, /bilak/, /mokha/ etc. as plural markers.

Many Tibeto-Burman languages such as Rabha, Tiwa, Mising, Karbi, etc., use a variety of such types of plural markers. In Khasi also a plural system is observed, as in /iey/ 'house', but /sikitien/ 'houses', where the plural marker /sikit/

is prefixed. In Tai-Ahom, the plural markers are /nam/, /khOn/, /cheo/ etc., as in /konnam/ 'man many', /lucho/ 'many horse', etc.

(d) The derivation of nouns from verbs through suffixation is a common feature in all the languages of this area. For example, the verb /kha/ in Asamiya meaning 'to eat' changes to the noun /kha On/ meaning 'good eating'. Almost all verbs can be transformed to nouns by the addition of the suffix /On/ in the language. In Garo the suffixes /ani/, /gipa/ and /gimin/ attach to a verb to change it to a noun, as in the verb /dak/ 'do' which changes to the noun /dakani/ 'being done', /dakgipa/ 'one who does' and /dakgimin/ 'already done', respectively.

(e) The extensive use of classifiers in all the languages in this area is another feature which is a peculiarity of the northeast. However, in certain Indian languages, limited use of a few classifiers are noticed. Among the new Indo-Aryan languages, the most notable being Bangla, Oriya, Maithili and Marathi, a few classifiers are used. Similarly, other languages like Santhali, Kurukh, and Malto of the Munda family make limited use of classifiers. But almost all the languages of the northeast (Asamiya, Khasi or any other Sino-Tibetan language) use a huge number of classifiers. For almost everything or every shape these languages use a different classifier. The following lists of classifiers from Asamiya, Boro and Garo prove the point.

Asamiya

/ZOn/	for males (adult)
/Zoni/	for females (women as well as animals)
/gOraki/	for man and woman (honorific)
/tu/	for inanimate objects or male of animals and men (impolite)
/ta/	for numbers.
/ti/	for inanimate objects or infants.
/khOn/	for flat, square or rectangular, big or small, long or short objects.
/khOni/	for objects like rivers and mountains etc.
/pat/	for things which are flat, thin, wide or narrow etc.
/SOta/	for solid objects
/kosa/	for mass nouns
/motha/	for bundles of objects
/muthi/	for smaller bundles of objects
/tar/	for broom-like objects
/gOs/	for wick-like objects
/khila/	for leaf-like things, papers, etc.

Boro

/sa/	with human beings
/ma/	with all types of living things
/thui/	with fruits, currency, teeth, stones etc.
/gOn/	for leaf-like objects.
/phan/	for trees, saplings etc.
/doi/	for eggs
/thote/	for posts, bamboo etc.

/suba/	for bamboo groves
/thuba/	for bamoo groves, shrubs etc.
/nOn/	for abstract objects.
/gon/	for horns, wooden objects, houses, weapons
/don/	for hair rope etc.
/dan/	for garlands etc.
/mutha/	for betel leaf, paddy
/athi/	for firewood
/dor/	for fish, nuts etc.
/bar/	for flowers and plants
/dan/	for days of the month
/san/	for days
/kha/	for human beings

Garó

/sak/	for people of all sorts, even gods and ghosts
/may/	for animals
/ge/	for all objects of daily use and also for fingers
/kin/	for thin flat things
/pat/	for paper
/min/	for words, stories, songs, etc.
/ron/	for round objects
/pon/	for hollow cylindrical objects
/din/	for rope-like things
/te/	for houses, rice pots, cups and other hollow objects
/gon/	for bank notes
/pan/	for plants and trees
/ban/	for parts of a whole
/dOt/	for things that stick out from the ground
/nOK/	for households
/jaK/	for leaves and pages of books
/gar/	for bunches of things
/paK/	for half of anything
	etc.

Moreover, the combination of classifiers with a noun and a numeral in constructing phrases and sentences is a distinct Sino-Tibetan feature shared by many languages such as Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, Burmese and Thai,⁸ which has crept into India through the Sino-Tibetan languages of the northeast and has influenced Asamiya and Khasi the most. The Magadhan group of languages, like Bangla, Oriya, Maithili etc. and a few other new Indo-Aryan languages like Marathi, some Dravidian languages like Kolami, Parji, etc. and Santhali and Malto of the Munda family spoken in central India, have also been influenced to some extent. The point to be noted here is that all the languages of the Northeast make extensive use of this system and the frequency of such use is at a comparatively higher level than the languages of the mainland as mentioned above. M.B. Emeneau in his study on the Indian linguistic area has observed that Marathi has a meager suggestion of such a system with one classifier (dzan) 'person' and

⁸Lanyon Orgill has observed that classifiers are at once the most important characteristic features of the Thai language.

(dzani) feminine, and the word order in such a construction is fixed as 'numeral + classifier + noun'. Kolami and Parji classify persons only when they are enumerated by the numeral six and over. The Kurukh system is similar to the Magadhan languages of Bangla, Oriya, Maithili, etc. The classifiers are used with the borrowed Indo-Aryan numerals as well as the Dravidian numerals from two to four. Malto, which has borrowed from the Magadhan group, has a fixed order of numeral + classifier + noun. In certain dialects of Telegu and Kannada limited use of this system is noted where the numerals from eight to ten are followed by a classifier /mandi/ when persons are enumerated (For detail see Emeneau, p. 649). The use of this unique system gets more limited in languages as we move away from the Northeast. The maximum use of this system among the languages of the mainland is observed in the Magadhan group bordering the various languages of the North-East. The use gets more and more limited as we go southward. This is a case of neighbourhood effect of this innovation which has its epicentre at the Northeast. In Sino-Tibetan languages, Asamiya, and Khasi, the use of this system is most frequent in comparison to any other in India. This is a distinct Sino-Tibetan feature which has engulfed Asamiya and Khasi totally. The following examples from different languages of this area show the validity of this statement. Mary R. Haas has rightly commented that the use of classifiers in Thai is a matter that must be treated not only as a part of the grammar of the language but also as part of its lexicography. The same holds true for each and every language of this area.

- (i) Numeral + classifier + Noun: This combination is used by Asamiya, Rajbongshi, Khasi, Konyak, Kakborak (Tripuri), Nocte, Mizo, Rangkhali, Karbi, Tiwa, etc.
- (ii) Noun + numeral + classifier: Asamiya, Bishnupriya Manipuri, Kachari, Rabhamese, Dimasa, Boro, etc.
- (iii) Noun + classifier + numeral: Garo, Nocte, Mizo, Hmar, Rabha, Tiwa, Apatani, Dimasa, Khasi, Mising, Kak Borak, Boro, Nishi, Ahom, Karbi, etc.
- (iv) Classifier + numeral + noun: Boro-Kachari, Tiwa, Nocte, Apatani, Tagin, Misimi, etc.

The classifiers are also combined with all types of nouns and numerals occurring in these languages.

Apart from such constructions, the use of a classifier along with the noun is very basic with all the languages of this area, as in Asamiya /kitap khon/ (book + classifier), /suli kusa/ (hair + classifier), etc.

Finally, it can be said that the use of classifiers is not a pan-Indian phenomenon but essentially a Sino-Tibetan feature and has spread to many other languages through the neighbourhood effect. The following examples from Ahom, Asamiya, Boro, and Kakborak show a few combinations of noun, numeral and classifier operating in these languages.

Tai-Ahom

- maw kham + sanj + luk (maw-vessel, kham-gold Sanj-two- LuK-classifier)
- phanum + phunj + lunj (pha-cloth, num-cotton, phunj-classifier, lunj-one)
- ma + tu + lunj (ma-horse, tu-classifier, lunj-one).
- lan + mak + lunj - (lan-jackfruit, mak-classifier, lunj-one)

Asamiya

E + zon + manuh (E - one, zon - classifier, manuh - man)
 du + khon + kitap (du - two, KhOn-classifier, kitap - book)
 Phul + E + ta (phul - flower, E-numeral, ta = classifier)
 pat + doh + khila (pat - leaf, doh - ten, khila - classifier)

Boro

mansi + sa + noi (mansi-man, Sa-classifier, noi - Two)
 gan + se + kitap. (gan- one, se-classifier, kitap-book)
 moi + der + nase (moi-one, der-classifier, nase- elephant)

KokBorak (Tripuri)

bu + phaᅇ + sa (bu-cow, phaᅇ-classifier, sa-one)
 dukhai + duk +tuᅇsa (dukhai-one, duk-classifier, tuᅇsa-rope)

2.3 Lexical features

(a) For the present study I did a pilot survey of fifty words, essentially a part of the basic vocabularies of Khasi (Austric), Asamiya (Indo-Aryan), Boro, Garo, Rabha, Mishing, Karbi, Tiwa and Angami (all Tibeto-Burman). The loanword percentage is calculated by dividing the items of acculturation by the total number of items on the list and multiplying it by one hundred. The list included various items such as common domesticated and wild animals, kinship terms, items of daily use, parts of a house, paddy-field, types of dress, names of rivers and places, and bodily functions and body parts.

The list was prepared from such various published works as (i) Kakati (1941), (ii) Grierson (1933), (iii) Medhi (reprinted 1988), (iv) Bhattacharya (1977), Goswami (1991), Balwan (1982), Wolfenden (1929), and Terang (1974). Lexical sources of each item in the list were taken from the above mentioned works as well as from dictionaries and other relevant materials available in the various languages. The following table shows the loanword percentages and the Austric, Indo-Aryan or Tibeto Burman influence.

	Austric		Indo-Aryan		Tibeto-Burman	
	Total Items (50)	%	Total Items (50)	%	Total Items (50)	%
Asamiya	14	28%			24	48%
Khasi			15	30%	17	34%
Boro	13	26%	26	52%		
Garo	20	40%	24	48%		
Rabha	18	36%	24	48%		
Mising	6	12%	28	56%		
Tiwa	11	22%	26	52%		
Karbi	23	46%	24	48%		
Angami	5	10%	9	18%		

It is interesting to observe from the table above that all the Tibeto-Burman languages (except Angami in Nagaland) spoken in the Brahmaputra valley show a uniformly similar percentage score and the rate of Asamiya (Indo-Aryan) influence is more in comparison to Khasi (Austric)⁹ and Angami (Tibeto-Burman). This may be attributed to the fact that Asamiya and the Tibeto-Burman languages, barring Angami, are directly exposed to each other and the process of diffusion was rapid and extensive. Since Angami and Khasi are slightly, isolated therefore the rate of influence be it Indo-Aryan, Tibeto-Burma or Austric, is relatively less in comparison to the other languages. Another important factor to be considered is that a majority of the population of the different Tibeto-Burman groups in the Brahmaputra valley adopted Hinduism, and as a result the process of Aryanization was accelerated, which is not true in the case of Khasi or Angami. From the table it is clear that all the language families have influenced each other and the more the languages are exposed to one another the higher is the rate of influence. However, this minor study on lexical acculturation were to be taken up in an extensive way where all the Tibeto-Burman languages, Khasi and Asamiya are taken into account in a much broader canvas, I am sure it would throw more light on such an important linguistic aspect.

(b) Another interesting lexical phenomenon is the commonality of place and river names of all the languages spoken in the northeast, which is not shared by any languages in the entire Indian sub-continent. In the derivation of such names many Sino-Tibetan and Austric features have distinctly crept into, as in:

(i) The Boro word 'di' for water is noticed in innumerable river names in the northeast, as in dihiŋ, diborU, dibonŋ, digaru, dikhou, dikreŋ, disaŋ, digboi (boi meaning 'flow of water' in Asamiya).

(ii) The Tai-Ahom influence is also evident in such names, where the Tai-Ahom equivalent for water is nam. The mighty Brahmaputra is nam-ti-lao, other such names are nam-daŋ, nam-zin, nam-khun, nam-saŋ, nam-khe, nam-shao, nam-rup, nam-ti, nam-phuk, nam-sai, nam-choom etc.

(iii) The Khasi equivalent for river is /um/ and occurs in many names found in these parts, as in umtru, umsuŋ, umiam, umraŋsu, umpliŋ, um-Khrah etc.

(iv) -ti- is a typical Tai-Ahom classifier which has crept into all the languages in the northeast. In Ahom it is particularly used with place names which eventually became names of many important places in the northeast, such as tiphuk, tipam, tiru, tirap, tifi, tiŋkhon, tiŋ rai, tiOk, tiho, etc.

3. Conclusion

The preceding cross-language evidence indicates that such common structural features of all the languages spoken in the northeastern part of India together separate this area from the rest of the Indian sub-continent as such features are not to be found in most of the languages in the country. This I feel is enough evidence to term northeast India as a separate linguistic area where socio-cultural

⁹However, in Karbi the Austric influence is the maximum in comparison to the other languages in the Brahmaputra valley, as it is directly exposed to Khasi.

and linguistic diffusion between the different language families has been going on for centuries.

However, in my opinion a more detailed typological investigation of individual language cases will definitely throw more light on such shared cross-linguistic features of the languages of this area.

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