

## Hajong- A Study in Relation to Assamese and Bengali

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**Abstract:** Hajong is a language used by the ethnic tribe called Hajong living in the states of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya and West Bengal in India and the Mymensing district in Bangladesh. The Hajong language belongs to the Indo Aryan (IA) family of language. As per the Ethnologue, Hajong is classified as Indo-European > Indo- Iranian > Indo- Aryan > Eastern zone > Bengali- Assamese. The Hajong language used by the Hajong people today may be considered as a mixture of Assamese and Bengali (involving different dialects of these languages). The Hajongs of Assam are seen to use a mixture of Kamrupi and Goalparia dialects of the Assamese language in their conversation. However, Ratan Kumar Ray Hajong (1982) holds that the Hajongs had their own language in the distant past and it disappeared in course of time the certain reasons for which are known to nobody. Our study reveals that Hajong as spoken in the present day has affinity with Assamese and Bengali as well as it has

some unique features of its own. "Hajong is classified as an Indo-Aryan language. It has some degree of similarity with Assamese and Bengali, the two IA languages spoken in the region" (Guts 2012). The paper tries to introduce this tribal language and analyze how it has affinity with Assamese and Bengali. It also tries to discuss about its linguistic features along with its present status concerning its development.

**Key Words:** Hajong, Affinity, Assamese, Bengali and Unique features.

## INTRODUCTION

Hajong language is used by the ethnic tribe called Hajong who are living in the states of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya and West Bengal in India and the Mymensing district in Bangladesh. Before going to discuss about their language it may be significant to mention briefly about the people. The history of the Hajongs reveals facts regarding their critical passage of time which is not free from controversy. Scholars and even the Hajong people themselves do not agree on their history. Some say that the Hajong originated in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh and then migrated to the northern areas of Bangladesh and into India (*Hajang of Bangladesh* n.d.). According to another account, the Hajong came from Tibet as descendents of the Kachari people and settled in the Kamrup area of Assam state for many years (*The Bangladesh Observer: Culture of the Hajong Tribe*). One

Hajong author refers to when he writes “The Hajongs claim their ancestral home was in Hajo area of present Nalbari district of Assam” [1]. He goes on to explain that some Mongoloid tribes came to power in that area in the mid-1400s. They were under 12 ‘Koch’ chiefs, the most powerful of whom was Hajo. A grandson of Hajo founded the Koch kingdom, converted to Hinduism, and took the name Rajbangsi. Many people of the area apparently did the same, while others became Muslim. Those remaining faithful to Hajo began to call themselves “Hajbongsis,” which in time became “Hajong” [2]. From the Kamrup and Nalbari areas of Assam, the Hajong spread to surrounding areas; it is not clear when or why they moved. It may have been in the early 1600s when Raghudev and his son controlled a large area or may have been during the Maan invasion when people of the area were tortured [3]. It may have been due to a major natural disaster that forced people to relocate (The Bangladesh Observer: *Culture of the Hajong Tribe*). Whatever the cause, it seems clear that some event or series of events compelled the Hajong to move to other areas of Assam and to Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, and northern Bangladesh.

As per information from Wikipedia Encyclopedia, Hajong is spoken by more than 175,000 all over the world. Apart from other states like Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh and West Bengal in India, in the north eastern state of Assam only, the number of Hajong speakers are approximately 100,000 [4]. There are differences of opinion amongst scholars regarding the Hajong language. The language as used by the Hajong people today may be considered as a mixture of Assamese and Bengali (involving different dialects of these languages). The Hajongs of Assam are seen to use a mixture of **Kamrupi** and **Goalparia** dialects of the Assamese language in their conversation [5]. Some scholars call it **Jharua** dialect of Assamese, while some others regard the Hajong language spoken nowadays as a branch of **Kamrupi** language (colloquial Assamese spoken in lower Assam). However, Ratan Kumar Ray Hajong (1982) holds that the Hajongs had their own language in the distant past which disappeared in course of time; the certain reasons are known to nobody [6].

## OBJECTIVES

The paper mainly intends to establish objectives mentioned as below.

- To introduce the Hajong Language and its speakers.
- To analyse the language regarding its affinity with other language.
- To examine the differences with other language.
- To observe the unique features of Hajong.

## METHODOLOGY

Both primary and secondary sources have been used for the study. The secondary sources include books, articles and data gathered from internet while the primary source includes data collected mainly from field investigation.

## CLASSIFICATION OF HAJONG

The Hajong language belongs to the Indo Aryan (IA) family of language. As per the the Ethnologue Hajong is classified as Indo-European > Indo- Iranian > Indo-Aryan > Eastern zone > Bengali- Assamese [7].

Some scholars, however, argue that Hajong belongs to Bodo group of Tibeto-Burman (TB) language family. The other languages belonging to the Bodo group are spoken by the following tribes- Bodo, Kachari, Rabha, Mech, Garo and Tripuri etc. But, the language spoken by the Hajongs had taken its present changed structure from its old form passing through various ups and downs and through different circumstances [8].

According to Grierson, “This is a corrupt form of Eastern Bengali spoken by members of the Haijong (often incorrectly called Hajong) tribe, a Tibeto-Burman clan settled in the districts of Mymensingh and Sylhet, principally in the country at the foot of the Garo Hills. Haijong (or Hajong) has hitherto been described as a Tibeto-Burman language, but the tribe has long abandoned its original form of speech” [9].

From the above analysis it may be concluded that Hajong as spoken today may be considered as an IA language.

## ASSAMESE AND BENGALI LANGUAGE

These two languages belong to Indo-Aryan Language family. Assamese is a scheduled language which is the official language of Assam as well as the predominant link language of the North Eastern states of India. Apart from Assam it is widely used in the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland. Bengali is a scheduled language which is the official state language of West Bengal and Tripura. Moreover, Bengali is the official language of Bangladesh. Since the Hajong people live in some North Eastern states of India, West Bengal and Bangladesh and the Hajong language is supposed to have originated as a mixture of these two languages i.e. Assamese and Bengali, so the affinity to these languages is a normal fact. Yet, it has been observed that the Hajong language has some dissimilarity with Assamese and Bengali in respect of vocabulary, pronunciation and other features. These are discussed with illustration as below.

### AFFINITY WITH ASSAMESE AND BENGALI

Study reveals that Hajong as spoken in the present day has affinity with both Assamese and Bengali. The following examples are given in support of the observation (Table-1).

Hajong (Trnsrptd.)	Meaning (Eng.)	Assamese (Trnsrptd.)	Bengali
/ɑndɑr/	dark	/ɑndhɑr/	/ɑndhɑr/
/dos/	ten	/dɔh/	/doʃ/
/dimu/	egg	/dima/	/dim
/ek/	one	/ek/	/ek/
/ga:s/	tree	/gɔs/	/ga:s/
/iŋrezi/	English	/iŋrazi/	/iŋrezi/
/moy/	I	/moi/	/ami/

/mas/	fish	/ma:s/	/ma:s/
/t <sup>h</sup> ɑndɑ/	cold	/t <sup>h</sup> ɑndɑ/	/t <sup>h</sup> ɑndɑ/

(Table-1: Hajong words similar in meaning/pronunciation with Assamese or Bengali)

The above examples explain that some Hajong words have more affinity with Assamese concerning either pronunciation or meaning or both compared to Bengali and vice versa. The pronunciation of the following words- /dimu/ and /moy/ are closer to Assamese concerning pronunciation and meaning; /dos/, /ga:s/, and /ma:s/ etc. are more closer to Bengali whereas /ɑndɑ/, /ek/, and /t<sup>h</sup>ɑndɑ/ etc. are similar to both Assamese and Bengali.

## DISSIMILARITIES WITH ASSAMESE AND BENGALI

Although examples of many similarities have been observed, there are dissimilarities also have come out of investigation. The following examples will elucidate the fact as seen in case of vocabulary, phonemes and other.

### Vocabulary (Table-2)

Hajong (Trnsrptd.)	Meaning (Eng.)	Assamese (Trnsrptd.)	Bengali (Trnsrptd.)
/din/	sky	/akas/, /akax/	/akash/
/hɑpɑl/	child	/sisu/, /xixu/	/shishu/
/heŋos/	cucumber	/tiyDh/	/shDsha/
/telkɑ/	cold	/thanda/	/thanda/
/totɑ/	hot	/gDrDm/	/gDrDm/

(Table-2: Hajong Vocabulary showing difference with Assamese and Bengali)

## Phonemes

Hajong, Assamese and Bengali differ in respect of the number of phonemes. As per our study, Hajong has 6 vowels and 25 (including 2 semi vowels) consonant phonemes (based on the investigation by the author concerning his research on the analysis of Hajong Phonology) whereas Assamese has 6 vowels and 24 (including 2 semi vowels) consonant phonemes [10]. Again, there are 7 vowels and 29 (including 2 semi vowels) consonant phonemes in Bengali [11]. Following Tables will show the phonemes of these three languages (Table- 3, 4, 5, 6 & 7).

**Table 3: Hajong Vowel Phonemes**

	Front	Centre	Back
High	i		u/u
Mid	e		o
Low		ɑ	

**Table 4: Hajong Consonant Phonemes**

	Bilabial		Alveolar		Alveo-Palatal		Velar		Glottal	
	VL	VD	VL	VD	VL	VD	VL	VD	VL	VD
unasp Stops asp	p	b	t	d			k	g		
	p <sup>h</sup>	b <sup>h</sup>	t <sup>h</sup>	d <sup>h</sup>			k <sup>h</sup>	g <sup>h</sup>		
Unasp Affricates asp					č	z				
					ʃ	z <sup>h</sup>				
Fricative					s				h	
Nasal		m		n				ŋ		
Lateral				l						
Trill				r						
Semi Vowel		w				y				

**Table-5: Assamese Vowel Phonem**

	Front	Centre	Back
Close	i		u
Half-close	e		o
Half-open	ɛ		ɔ
Open		a	

**Table-6: Assamese Consonant Phonemes**

	Bi-labial		Alveolar		Palatal		Velar		Glottal
Plosive: Unaspirated	p	b	t	d	---	--	k	g	--
Aspirated	ph	bh	th	dh	---	--	kh	gh	
Fricative	---	--	s	z	--	--	x	--	h
Nasal	--	m	--	n	--	--	--	ŋ	--
Lateral	--	--	--	l	--	--	--	--	--
Rolled	--	--	--	r	--	--	--	--	--
Semi-Vowels	--	w	--	--	--	j	--	--	--

**Table-7: Bengali Phonemes (Vowels/Consonants)**

Vowels			Consonants						
	Front	Central	Back	Labial	Dental/ Alveolar	Retroflex	Palato- alveolar	Velar	Glottal
<b>Close</b>	i		u						
	i		u	<b>Nasal</b>	m	n			ŋ
<b>Close- mid</b>	e		o		m	n			ng
	e		o	<b>tenuis</b>	p	t̪	ʈ	tʃ~ts	k~χ
<b>Open- mid</b>	æ		ɔ		p	t	ʈ	c	k
	æ		ô	<b>aspirated</b>	p <sup>h</sup>	t̪ <sup>h</sup>	t̪ <sup>h</sup>	tʃ <sup>h</sup> ~ts <sup>h</sup>	k <sup>h</sup> ~χ
<b>Open</b>	a				ph	th	ʈh	ch	kh
	a			<b>Stop</b>	b~β	ɖ	ɖ	dʒ~dz	ɡ~ɣ
				<b>voiced</b>	b	d	ɖ	j	g
				<b>murmured</b>	b <sup>h</sup> ~β	ɖ <sup>h</sup> ~ɖ	ɖ <sup>h</sup> ~ɖ	dʒ <sup>h</sup> ~dz	ɡ <sup>h</sup> ~
					bh	dh	ɖh	jh	ɣ
									gh
				<b>Ericative</b>	(f~ϕ)	(s <sup>2</sup> , z <sup>3</sup> )		ʃ	h~ɦ
					(f)	(s, z)		sh	h
				<b>Approximant</b>	(w)	l		(j)	
						l			
				<b>Rhotic</b>		r <sup>4</sup>	ɽ <sup>4</sup>		
						r	ɽ		

(Source: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bengali\\_phonology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bengali_phonology))

### Other features

Affinity with Assamese and Bengali is very clear although there are some differences which have been illustrated with examples as presented above. It has been observed that almost all the phonemes of Hajong correspond with the phonemes of Assamese and Bengali with a bit differences with either Assamese or Bengali or both. However, in case of one vowel phoneme /ʊ/, it does not correspond with either Assamese or Bengali or any other Indo-Aryan language. “The Hajong vowel /ʊ/ is not present in most of the IA languages but typical for TB family.”[12]. It is available in TB languages like Bodo, Garo etc. Hence, this may be considered as a unique feature of Hajong as an IA language.

### CONCLUSION

From the above discussion, it may be concluded as follows: a) Hajong belongs to IA language family. b) The influence of Assamese and Bengali is predominant on the vocabulary of Hajong. c) The sound system of Hajong has close proximity with Assamese and Bengali. d) The vowel phoneme /ʊ/ used in Hajong reminds us to assume that the Hajong people might have had a language of their own belonging to TB family, which had become extinct due to some unknown reasons and the influence of it might have been available in some linguistic features of the present Hajong language. This further reminds about Hajong people’s racial affinity to the Mongoloids and their sub sect Bodos with whom they have physical as well as cultural similarities. e) However, it is observed that the Hajong language

today has been well recognized and accepted by its speakers that a lot of work has been carried concerning Hajong literature today.

## RECOMMENDATION

There are ample scopes of research on the Hajong language concerning its various linguistic features as well as a comparative analysis with other IA languages. Hence, an intensive study about the language may be significant for a new linguistic insight concerning Hajong since an intensive study covering all aspects i.e. phonology, morphology and syntax has not been done till date.

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