

On Hajong Gender and Its Formation- A Comparative Analysis with Assamese

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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 (Gordon 2005). 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 (Ray Hajong, R.K. 2003). However, Ray Hajong (1982) holds that the Hajongs had their own language in the distant past that disappeared in course of time the certain reasons for which are known to nobody. "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). This paper is an attempt to introduce the Hajong language in general and discuss the gender system of it in particular. While discussing the gender system, it will present the types of genders available in this language with their examples. In Hajong, there are four types of genders i.e. masculine, feminine, neuter, and common gender. It is observed that some words are changed from masculine to feminine by the addition of affixes. For example, M/nilaz/> F/nilazi/ (/nilaz+/i/) 'shameless'; M/biui/> F/biuni/ (/biui+/ni/). Again, some generic words are changed to masculine or feminine by adding specific gender terms. Consider the example: M/morod mUun/ 'man/male' > F/timUut mUun/ 'woman/female' (here, /mUun/ 'generic term for both man and woman', /morod/ 'gender term for man/male', and /timUut/ 'gender term for woman/female'). There are some words in Hajong that indicate neither masculine nor feminine. These fall under the category called neuter gender e.g. N/phul/ 'flower', N/gas/ 'tree', N/kolom/ 'pen' etc. Again, some Hajong words are considered as indicating both masculine and feminine which are included in common gender. Examples of common gender words of Hajong are as follows: C/mUun/ 'man (generic term)', /sawa/ 'child', /hagol/ 'goat'. Study reveals that some words in Hajong indicate feminine gender only. Consider the following: F/prithivi/ 'world', F/bhasa/ 'language'. Again, some words are considered as masculine only e.g. M/surzo/ 'the sun', M/sumui/ 'time'. The paper tries to discuss the processes involved in the formation of different gender words in Hajong. It also tries to present a brief comparative analysis of the gender system of Hajong with that of Assamese to which it has a close affinity.

Key words: Hajong, Gender system, Assamese, Comparative Analysis.

Abbreviations: C- Common Gender, F- Feminine Gender, M- Masculine Gender, N- Neuter Gender

Introduction:

Hajong is a language spoken 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 (Gordon 2005). 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 (Ray Hajong, R.K. 2003). However, Ray Hajong (1982) holds that the Hajongs had their own language in the distant past that disappeared in course of time the certain reasons for which are known to nobody. “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).

After the partition of India, the Hajong people migrated to the north eastern region of India from their home place in present Bangladesh due to political reasons. Their language known as Hajong is an unscheduled language that has been considered endangered due to its decreasing use by the native users of new generations. From survey, it has been observed that in Assam many speakers of new generation do not know some native terms and use Assamese synonyms of Hajong words. Hajong has affinity to Assamese and Bangla (Bengali) in terms of phonology, morphology and syntax. The influence of these Indo-Aryan languages is evident in the grammatical forms of Hajong. The Hajong people living in Assam are in close contact with Assamese language due to their living in close proximity with Assamese people as well as Assamese as the medium of instruction. Hence, the grammatical forms of Hajong language are mostly found identical with Assamese.

Linguistic affiliation of Hajong:

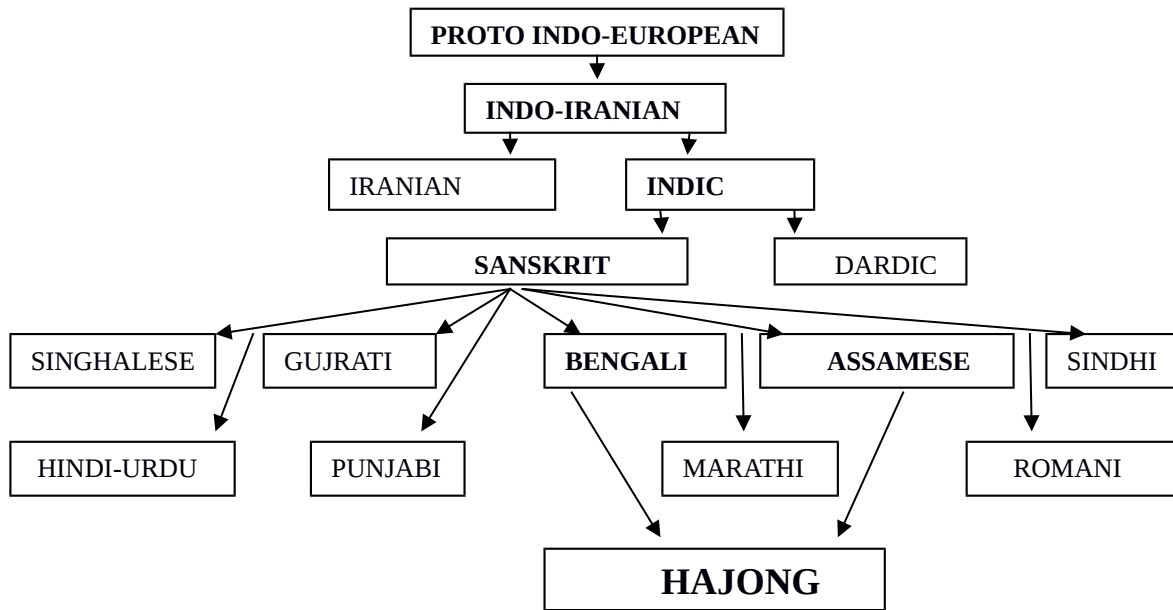


Figure : Proto Indo-European Family Tree

Objectives:

The main objectives of the paper are as the following:

1. To introduce the Hajong language.
2. To discuss about the Hajong language used in Assam.
3. To show the affinity of Hajong with Assamese.
4. To discuss about the Gender system of Hajong.
5. To analyze the gender system of Hajong comparing with that of Assamese.

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.

Hajong Gender:

In Hajong, there are four types of genders i.e. masculine, feminine, neuter, and common gender. This Gender system is found corresponding to that of Assamese. "NIA languages like Assamese, Bengali and Oriya possess the natural gender system in which animate beings and inanimate things are classified as masculine, feminine or neuter according to their sex or lack of sex.... Most of the nouns, few pronouns, few adjectives and classifiers denote masculine and feminine genders in

Assamese. But the common nouns denoting human beings and animals do not indicate the sex. Such common nouns fall under common gender e.g. *mānuh*, *garu*, *hātī*” (Saikia Bora). The words like *mānuh* ‘man’, *garu* ‘cow’ and *hātī* ‘elephant’ denote common sex both male and female; but these can be made either masculine or feminine by adding separate qualifying words *matā* (he/male) and *māikī* (she/female) respectively. For example, *matā mānuh* ‘male person’, *māikī mānuh* ‘female person’. Similar is the case with Hajong where qualifying terms *marad* ‘male’ and *timat* ‘female’ may be used to make the common nouns as masculine or feminine gender. Besides, there are some words that denote no sex either male or female or common which are considered as neuter gender. For example, *phul* ‘flower’, *phɔl* ‘fruit’ etc. which neither denote any sex nor can be changed into masculine or feminine by any means.

Let us find out both Hajong and Assamese words indicating different categories of genders as enlisted in Tables below.

Table1. Masculine and Feminine Gender

Masculine			Feminine		
Hajong	Assamese	Eng. meaning	Hajong	Assamese	Eng. Meaning
<i>baba</i>	<i>Deutā</i>	Father	<i>aiu, ma,</i>	<i>mā,</i>	Mother
<i>bhatar</i>	<i>Girīek</i>	Husband	<i>Magu</i>	<i>ghoinīek</i>	Wife
<i>buu</i>	<i>Burhā</i>	old man	<i>bui</i>	<i>burhī</i>	old woman
<i>kaka</i>	<i>Khurā</i>	uncle (paternal)	<i>Kaki</i>	<i>khurī</i>	aunt (maternal)
<i>chengra</i>	<i>lɔrā</i>	Boy	<i>Chengri</i>	<i>choālī</i>	Girl
<i>bɔr</i>	<i>dɔrā</i>	Bridegroom	<i>kɔina</i>	<i>kɔinā</i>	Bride

Table2. Common Gender

Hajong	Assamese	Eng. Meaning
<i>Beng</i>	<i>beng, bhekulī</i>	Frog
<i>haɔl</i>	<i>sagɔli</i>	Goat
<i>kauu</i>	<i>Kaurī</i>	Crow

Table 3. Neuter Gender

Hajong	Assamese	Eng. Meaning
<i>Phul</i>	<i>Phul</i>	Flower
<i>ba’s</i>	<i>Bāh</i>	Bamboo
<i>ga’s</i>	<i>gɔs</i>	Tree

Distinction of Gender Words:

The distinction of sex may be expressed in different ways through using separate noun bases, adding other qualifying words to the root word or by adding suffixes etc. Hajong gender words generally follow these procedures which are found in Assamese too. In Assamese, the distinction of sex may be expressed mainly by the following three ways: using separate noun bases for male and female; using separate qualifying words before or after the common nouns; and using different suffixes (Goswami, 1978). The formation of gender words of Hajong and Assamese through the above mentioned procedures are shown in the tables below.

i. Using separate noun bases for male and female:

Masculine			Feminine		
Hajong	Assamese	Eng. meaning	Hajong	Assamese	Eng. Meaning
<i>baba</i>	<i>Deutā</i>	Father	<i>aiua, ma,</i>	<i>mā,</i>	Mother
<i>bhatar</i>	<i>Girītek</i>	Husband	<i>Magu</i>	<i>ghoinītek</i>	Wife
<i>bōr</i>	<i>dōrā</i>	Bridegroom	<i>kōina</i>	<i>kōinā</i>	Bride

ii. Adding other qualifying words:

In Hajong, the qualifying words *mōrōd* and *timat* are added after the common nouns to make them masculine and feminine respectively. For example:

<i>mōrōd muun</i> ‘male person’	<i>timat muun</i> ‘female person’
<i>mōrōd sawa</i> ‘male child’	<i>timat sawa</i> ‘female child’
<i>mōrōd kukul</i> ‘male dog’	<i>timat sawa</i> ‘female dog’

Similarly, in Assamese also the words *mōta* and *maiki* are added after the common nouns to make masculine and feminine respectively. For instance:

<i>mōta manuh</i> ‘male person’	<i>maiki manuh</i> ‘female person’
<i>mōta sagōli</i> ‘male goat’	<i>maiki sagōli</i> ‘female goat’
<i>mōta kukur</i> ‘male dog’	<i>maiki kukur</i> ‘female dog’

iii. Using different suffixes:

There are some suffixes added after the words indicating masculine. These suffixes may be called feminine suffix. In both Hajong and Assamese, suffixes are available adding which masculine words are changed into feminine. However, in Hajong, only two such suffixes *-i* and *-ɔni* are seen to be used for the purpose while more numbers of suffixes are used in Assamese. The use of *-i* and *-ɔni* in both Hajong and Assamese are shown with example as the following (Table-4):

Table 4. Masculine changed into Feminine by adding suffixes *-i/ ɔni*:

Masculine			Feminine		
Hajong	Assamese	Eng. Meaning	Hajong	Assamese	Eng. Meaning
<i>hɔrin</i>	<i>hɔrin</i>	male deer	<i>hɔrini(hɔrin+i)</i>	<i>hɔrini(hɔrin+i)</i>	female deer
<i>Nilaz</i>	<i>Nilaz</i>	shameless male person	<i>nilazi (nilaz+i)</i>	<i>nilazi (nilaz+i)</i>	shameless female person
<i>dactɔr</i>	<i>dactɔr</i>	male doctor	<i>dactɔrɔni</i> (<i>dactɔr + ɔni</i>)	<i>dactɔrani</i> (<i>dactɔr + ɔni</i>)	female doctor
<i>mastɔr</i>	<i>mastɔr</i>	male teacher	<i>mastɔrɔni</i> (<i>mastɔr + ɔni</i>)	<i>mastɔrɔni</i> (<i>mastɔr + ɔni</i>)	female teacher

Words indicating feminine:

There are some words in Hajong which are feminine in nature and they cannot be changed into masculine. For example, *bhasa* ‘language’, *sɔbha* ‘meeting’, *prithvi* ‘earth’, *Gɔnga* ‘river Ganga’, *Yamuna* ‘river Yamuma’ etc. In Assamese also, such terms are considered as feminine.

Conclusion:

The study reveals the following findings:

- .Hajong has a very simple gender system like other IA languages.
- .Affinity between Hajong and Assamese gender system is remarkable.
- .Excepting a few, Hajong gender formation processes are similar with Assamese.
- .Hajong has affinity with Assamese in terms of vocabulary, too.

Recommendation:

Hajong is a lesser known unscheduled tribal language that a few studies on particular linguistic aspects have been done so far. A few numbers of works on Hajong phonology has already been done,

but few works on morphology and syntax have been done so far. It has been found that the community concerned i.e. the Hajong is fully involved for the development of their language. Therefore, there is ample scope of research on various linguistic aspects of Hajong.

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