



## **Kokborok Dialects and Linguistic Diversity: A Study of Variations and Morphological Processes**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Kokborok, the language of the indigenous Borok people of Tripura, exhibits significant dialectal diversity, influenced by geographical distribution, historical evolution, and contact with other languages. This study explores the phonetic, lexical, morphological, and syntactic variations across different Kokborok dialects, with a particular focus on the Agartala dialect and its prominence in academic and administrative settings. By analyzing inflectional and derivational morphology, verb conjugation, and word formation processes, this volume sheds light on how linguistic structures vary across regions. In ancient times, Kokborok was spoken by a large number of people across the Northeastern region of India, Tibet, Nepal, Darjeeling, Cooch Behar, Kalimpong, Kurseong, and the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh, including Khagrachhari, Rangamati, Comilla, and Bandarban. However, during that period, the language existed only in oral form, and no specific name may have been assigned to it. Due to the geographical separation of communities over long distances, dialectal variations began to emerge. Wherever the Borok people settled, they adapted by borrowing words from neighboring language groups. Had Kokborok developed a written script in its early stages, linguistic diversity might have been less pronounced, and the language

could have remained more unified. Despite its variations, Kokborok remains a significant linguistic heritage, and its historical evolution reflects the resilience and adaptability of its speakers. External influences from Bengali, Hindi, and English have contributed to shifts in pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar, leading to gradual changes in dialectal usage. Migration, urbanization, and educational policies have also played a role in shaping linguistic trends, impacting the degree of dialect preservation in different communities. Additionally, this study emphasizes the need for systematic documentation and research on Kokborok dialects to prevent linguistic erosion and to promote language preservation efforts. By examining the linguistic diversity of Kokborok, this volume aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how dialectal variations contribute to the richness of the language. It highlights the importance of dialect documentation, education, and revitalization strategies to ensure that the full spectrum of Kokborok's linguistic heritage is preserved for future generations.

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## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1 Overview of Linguistic Diversity in Kokborok**

Kokborok, the principal language of the indigenous Borok people of Tripura, is part of the Tibeto-Burman language family. Over centuries, the language has evolved into distinct dialects influenced by geographical, cultural, and historical factors. The existence of multiple dialects reflects the linguistic diversity within the Borok communities, demonstrating variations in pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar. Despite this richness, the differences between dialects remain underexplored, with most linguistic studies focusing on the standardized Agartala dialect

For example: Relation between Kokborok and Tibetan

Kokborok	Tibetan	Meaning
Huk	jhuk	jhum cultivation

Harung	rong	mountain valley
Yak	phiyak	hand
Ang	nonga	I
Muk	mik	eye
Cha	ja	to eat
Ah	nya	fish
Yakung	rakang	leg
Rwngmung	ringlugs	knowledge
Biyang	gang	to which side
Khuk	kho	mouth

## 1.2 Importance of Studying Dialectal Variations in Kokborok

Understanding Kokborok’s dialectal variations is crucial for several reasons. First, it provides insights into the historical development of the language and its interaction with external linguistic influences. Second, dialectal research helps in language preservation by documenting unique linguistic features that might otherwise be lost due to standardization or language shift. Third, recognizing dialectal differences ensures inclusive language planning, allowing for the development of educational materials and policies that respect linguistic diversity.

# Relation between Kokborok & Meitei language

KOKBOROK	MEITEI	MEANIG
Cha	Cha	to eat
Wak	Ok	Pig
Nwng	Nong	you

Maicha	Maicha	Chair
Ok	Puk	Belly
Swlai	lai	Tongue
Som	Thom	Salt
Twisa	Turen	Small river
Laiphang	Lophu	Banana tree
Swi	Hui	Dog
Swng	Hong	to ask

A comparative study of Kokborok and Meitei languages reveals significant linguistic similarities in terms of lexicon, tone, phonology, morphology, and grammar. Some words share similar sounds, while others exhibit phonetic variations, such as blended sounds or the substitution of ‘h’ for ‘s’ in pronunciation.

Both Kokborok and Meitei belong to the Sino-Tibetan language family; however, they originate from different sub-branches. Kokborok belongs to the Bodo-Naga branch, whereas Meitei falls under the Burmese-Kuki-Chin branch. Despite their distinct classifications, the structural and phonetic resemblances between the two languages highlight their shared linguistic ancestry within the broader Sino-Tibetan family.

\*For example: Relation between Kokborok & Naga language

Kokborok	Angami	Noagaon Naga	Meaning
Misrum	mohase	mocha	ant
Nwng	No	Na	you
Bo	Po	Pa	she/he
Kwnwi	Kenna	Anna	two
Chuku	Teku	Taku	Nine



Tini	Tha	Ta	Today
Cha	Chi	Chijong	to eat
Mwnwi	New	Monnu	Smile

#### # Relation between Kokborok & Chang Naga language

Kokborok	Chang Naga	Meaning
Lama	Lam	Road
Som	Sok	Salt
Rang	Raka	Money
Khok	Keka	to steal
Nini	Ni	you
Sini	Sane	Nine
Chuku	Choko	Seven
Bukung	Unghung	Nose
Nuk	Nogu	to see
Char	Chacha	Eight
Chi	Chiro	Ten
Thwi	Thiye	to die

A comparative study of Kokborok and the Angami Naga, Noagaon Naga, and Chang Naga languages reveals significant linguistic similarities in lexicon, tone, phonemic structure, morphology, and grammar. Some words exhibit phonetic parallels, while others show blended sounds or shared linguistic features. Additionally, certain words related to objects, actions, or abstract concepts demonstrate a strong lexical connection among these languages.



These similarities suggest a common linguistic ancestry within the Sino-Tibetan language family, highlighting historical and cultural interactions among the Borok and Naga communities.

#### # Relation between Kokborok & Garo language

Kokborok	Garo	Meaning
Mai	Mi	Peddy
Mairung	Merong	Rice
Nok	Nok	House

\*In Kokborok (t) becomes (d) in Garo

Tok	Do	bird/cock
Tokbwma	Dobima	Hen with chicks
Tokbupha	Dobipha	Male hen
Tokha	Dokha	Crow

\*In Kokborok (k) becomes (g) in Garo

Kuphur	Gupeke	white colour
Kwchak	Guchchak	red
Kosom	Gisim	Black

#### # Relation between Kokborok & Bodo language

Kokborok	Bodo	Meaning
Ang	Ang	I
Ba1	Ba1	Five
Ba2	Ba2	to bear on the back



Bam	Bam	to take on the lap
Bo	Bo	He/She
Kwma	kwma	to loss
Lama	Lama	Road
Mai	Mai	Peddy
Nai	Nai	to see

#### # Relation between Kokborok & Dimasa language

Kokborok	Dimasa	Meaning
Ang	Ang	I
Ani	Ani	My
Ma	Ma	Mother
Mai	Mai	Peddy
Nwpha	Nwpha	your father
Nwng	Nwng	you
Misip	Misip	Buffalo

The comparative study of Kokborok, Dimasa, Bodo, and Garo languages indicates that they are closely related, as they originate from the same parental language family. This linguistic connection is supported by historical and structural similarities observed across these languages.

A relevant reference to this phenomenon is found in the globally recognized book, *An Introduction to Descriptive Linguistics*, written by the renowned American linguist H.A. Gleason Jr. On page 450, he states:



“If sixty-six percent of the basic morpheme stock seems to be cognate in two languages, we may assume that they have been separate for 1000 years. If 44 percent is cognate, 2000 years is the most probable period of separation.”

According to Glottochronology, a linguistic method used to estimate the time of language divergence, a comparative study of Kokborok and Dimasa reveals 55 to 60 percent cognate morpheme stock. Based on this analysis, it can be estimated that Kokborok and Dimasa diverged into separate languages approximately 1200 to 1400 years ago.

## **2. Dialects of Kokborok**

### **2.1 Classification of Major Kokborok Dialects**

Kokborok, spoken by various indigenous communities in Tripura, is not a monolithic language but comprises several dialects. These dialects exhibit phonetic, lexical, and grammatical differences based on regional and ethnic influences. The primary dialects of Kokborok can be classified as follows:

According to records from the Government of Tripura, Kokborok is spoken by eight indigenous communities, namely: Old Tripuri, Reang, Jamatia, Noatia, Murasing, Kalai, Rupini, and Uchoi. Historically, these communities originated from a single group but became distinct over time due to sociopolitical influences.

During the Manikya Dynasty, the Tripuri king introduced different surnames and social roles to various groups for effective governance. For instance:

- The Jamatia community was given its name because they were appointed as priests. As the Tripura king came under the influence of Hinduism, Jamatias were required to wear a sacred white thread across their right shoulder to the left waist and were prohibited from consuming meat.
- The Reang community was assigned leadership roles in the royal army, and their surname was given accordingly.
- Similarly, each group was designated a distinct identity, though they were originally all known as 'Tipra', as mentioned in the introduction.





Despite these distinctions, the root language remains the same, with only dialectal variations in pronunciation. Some communities pronounce certain words in a short form, while others use longer variations, but the core linguistic structure remains consistent.

OLD TRIPURI	JAMATIA	KALAI	MURASING	MEANING
Thaborchuk	Thaborchuk	Thabolchuk	Thabolchuk	Cassava
Thabolong	Thabolong	Thabolong	Thabolong	Yom/ jungle local potato
Thaichuk	Thaichuk	Thaichu	Thaichuk	Mango
Thaipung	Thaipong	Thaipung	Thaipong	Jackfruit

REANG	NUATIA	RUPINI	UCHOI	MEANING
Thaborchu	Thaborchuk	Thabolchuk	Thabolchuk	Cassava
Thabolong	Thabolong	Thabolong	Thabolong	Yom/ jungle local potato
Thaichuk	Thaichuk	Thaikuchu	Thaichuk	Mango
Thaiphung	Thaiphong	Thaiphong	Thaiphung	Jackfruit

- **Agartala Dialect:** The most widely used and standardized dialect, commonly spoken in and around Agartala and used in educational and administrative settings.
- **Jamatia Dialect:** Spoken primarily by the Jamatia community, this dialect retains several archaic features not found in the Agartala dialect.
- **Reang (Bru) Dialect:** Spoken by the Reang community, this dialect has notable phonetic variations and influences from neighbouring languages due to geographical dispersion.
- **Noatia and Murasing Dialects:** Variants spoken by the Noatia and Murasing communities, which have distinct lexical and phonetic characteristics.



- **Other Regional Variants:** Additional minor dialects exist within smaller tribal groups, each with its unique linguistic elements shaped by historical and migratory factors.

## 2.2 Regional Variations and Their Linguistic Significance

The regional dialects of Kokborok serve as markers of identity, reflecting the diverse heritage of the Borok people. While mutual intelligibility exists between dialects, certain phonetic shifts, lexical substitutions, and grammatical structures distinguish one dialect from another. For example:

- The Reang dialect tends to preserve nasalized vowels absent in the Agartala dialect.
- The Jamatia dialect retains older word forms that have been replaced in other dialects.
- Certain dialects incorporate loanwords from Bengali and other neighbouring languages at different levels, affecting vocabulary usage.

Understanding these regional variations is essential for linguistic documentation, ensuring that all dialects are represented in academic and policy-driven discussions on language preservation.

## 2.3 The Agartala Dialect and Its Prominence in Academic Discourse

The Agartala dialect has gained prominence due to its adoption in formal education, literature, and government communication. This standardization has contributed to the development of Kokborok grammar, teaching materials, and official documents. However, the dominance of one dialect raises concerns about the marginalization of other variants, leading to a gradual decline in their use and documentation.

Efforts to balance standardization with dialectal preservation are necessary to maintain Kokborok's rich linguistic diversity. Recognizing and documenting multiple dialects can contribute to inclusive language policies that respect and protect the linguistic rights of all Kokborok-speaking communities.

## 3. Phonetic and Lexical Variations in Kokborok Dialects

### 3.1 Pronunciation Differences Across Dialects

The phonetic structure of Kokborok varies significantly across dialects, influencing pronunciation patterns and sound shifts. Some key differences include:



- **Vowel Nasalization:** The Reang dialect tends to retain nasalized vowels, while the Agartala dialect has largely lost this feature.
- **Tone and Stress Patterns:** Certain dialects exhibit tonal variations that affect meaning, whereas others rely on stress or pitch differences.
- **Consonantal Changes:** The Jamatia and Noatia dialects sometimes use aspirated consonants differently from the Agartala dialect.

For example, in some dialects, words that begin with /k/ in the Agartala dialect may shift to /kh/ or /g/ in other regional variations.

### 3.2 Lexical Diversity and Vocabulary Shifts

Vocabulary differences between dialects often arise due to geographical isolation, cultural distinctions, and external linguistic influences.

- **Word Substitutions:** Some dialects use entirely different words for common objects and actions.
- **Loanwords:** The Agartala dialect, being more exposed to urban settings, incorporates more Bengali and English loanwords than rural dialects.

**Example: 'rwjai' original in Kokborok 'kheta'.**

- **Semantic Shifts:** Words in one dialect may take on different meanings in another, leading to variations in usage.

**Example:**  
    'kok' means 'language'  
    'kok' means 'to shoot'  
    'kok' means 'a kind of wild fruit'

For example, the word for "water" may be spoken as "twi" in one dialect and "toi" in another, demonstrating vowel modifications.

### 3.3 Influence of Neighbouring Languages on Dialectal Changes of Kokborok

Due to geographical and historical contact, Kokborok dialects have borrowed words and phonetic traits from neighbouring languages such as:



- **Bengali:** Loanwords for administrative and modern terms are more common in the Agartala dialect.

**Example: ‘kaka’ (Paternal uncle) original in Kokborok ‘khra’.**

- **Hindi:** Certain dialects spoken near mixed-language communities incorporate Hindi phrases.

**Example: ‘Yar’ (friend) original in Kokborok ‘kiching’.**

**English: ‘Table’ original in Kokborok ‘songphang’**

- **Mizo & Manipuri:** Dialects spoken near Mizoram or Manipur show influences in phonetic patterns and lexical choices.

While language contact enriches dialects, it also poses challenges in maintaining linguistic purity and intergenerational transmission of traditional vocabulary.

## 5. Syntactic Differences Across Dialects

### 5.1 Word Order Variations and Sentence Structure

Kokborok generally follows a Subject-Object-Verb (SOV) word order, but variations exist among dialects:

- In some dialects, **Subject-Verb-Object (SVO)** structures occasionally appear due to language contact with Bengali and Hindi.
- Some regional dialects use **optional word-final particles** to mark emphasis, which are absent in standardized Kokborok.
- Example:
  - **Agartala dialect:** *Ani mung Samprai* (My name is Samprai).
  - **Reang dialect:** *Aini ummung Samprai* (My name is Samprai).

### 5.2 Grammatical Agreement and Case Distinctions

Variations in agreement rules can be observed in different dialects, particularly in pronoun-verb agreement and noun case marking:



### 5.3 Changes in Negation, Tense, and Aspect Markers

Negation, tense, and aspect markers also exhibit differences between dialects:

- **Negation:** The negative particle *ma-* is commonly used, but its placement varies:
  - Example: *Ta-thangdi* (Don't go) vs. *Thangya tongdi*. (Do not go).
- **Tense and Aspect:**
  - Some dialects use **distinct auxiliary verbs** for tense marking.
  - Example:
    - **Agartala dialect:** *Bo kharlangkha* (He ran).
    - **Jamatia dialect:** *Bo kharlakha* (He had run).
- **Aspect Markers:** Variations exist in habitual, perfective, and progressive aspects.
  - Example: *Nwng thuwi tongo* (You are sleeping) vs. *Nwng thuwi de tong* (You have been sleeping).

These syntactic variations highlight the need for in-depth documentation of Kokborok dialects to ensure linguistic diversity is preserved.

## 6. External Influences on Dialectal Changes

### 6.1 Impact of Bengali, Hindi, and English on Kokborok Dialects

The influence of dominant regional and global languages has significantly shaped Kokborok dialects, affecting pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar.

- **Bengali Influence:**
  - Due to historical and administrative interactions, many Kokborok dialects incorporate Bengali loanwords, especially in urban areas.
  - Example: *Sarkar* (government) in Bengali → *Sorkar* (Kokborok).



- **Hindi Influence:**

- Found mainly in dialects spoken by communities exposed to Hindi media and mixed-language households.
- Example: *Dost/yar* (friend) in Hindi → *yar/ kiching* in Kokborok in some dialects).

- **English Influence:**

- Increasing in all dialects due to education, media, and technology.
- Example: *School, college, bus, computer* and *station* are often borrowed directly.

## 6.2 Role of Migration and Urbanization in Shaping Linguistic Variations

Migration between rural and urban areas has led to dialect mixing and language shifts.

- **Urbanization's Effect on Dialects:**

- The Agartala dialect, being used in administration and education, has influenced other dialects, leading to the gradual erosion of certain regional linguistic features.

- **Rural Dialect Preservation:**

- In remote tribal areas, older linguistic features are better preserved, with less external linguistic influence.

## 6.3 Effects of Education and Media on Dialect Standardization

- **Education's Role in Language Standardization:**

- Schools primarily teach the Agartala dialect, contributing to its dominance over other dialects.
- Dialects with fewer educational resources risk becoming endangered over time.

- **Media's Role in Dialectal Influence:**

- Print media, television, and radio broadcasts primarily use the standardized dialect, reinforcing its prominence.



- Social media, however, provides a platform for different dialects to gain visibility and allows for linguistic flexibility.

The combined effects of migration, education, and media have led to both the spread and loss of dialectal features, making it essential to document and revitalize Kokborok's dialectal diversity.

## 7. The Need for Dialect Documentation and Preservation of Koborok

### 7.1 Challenges in Recording and Studying Dialectal Differences of Koborok

The documentation of Kokborok dialects faces multiple challenges, including:

- **Lack of Written Records:** Many dialects have remained oral, with little to no written documentation, making linguistic research difficult.
- **Limited Linguistic Research:** Most studies focus on the standardized Agartala dialect, neglecting the rich variations found in rural and tribal communities.
- **Generational Language Shift:** Younger generations often prefer the standardized dialect or shift towards Bengali, Hindi, or English, leading to the gradual loss of dialectal diversity.

### 7.2 Importance of Linguistic Research in Preserving Dialectal Diversity of Koborok

- **Academic Studies:** Encouraging research on different Kokborok dialects will help document unique linguistic traits before they disappear.
- **Dictionary and Grammar Compilation of Koborok:** Creating comprehensive resources, such as dictionaries and grammar guides for various dialects, can aid preservation efforts.
- **Oral History Projects of Koborok:** Recording folktales, songs, and oral narratives in different dialects will ensure their transmission to future generations.

### 7.3 Strategies for Documentation and Revitalization Efforts.

- **Community-Led Initiatives:** Local speakers should be involved in language documentation projects to ensure accuracy and authenticity.



- **Technology and Digital Archives:**
  - Creating Kokborok dialectal archives using mobile applications, websites, and digital storytelling platforms.
  - Using social media to promote awareness of dialectal diversity.
- **Educational Inclusion:**
  - Introducing dialectal studies in school curricula to foster appreciation for linguistic diversity.
  - Organizing language workshops and cultural programs to encourage dialect preservation.

By addressing these challenges and implementing effective strategies, Kokborok's dialects can be preserved for future generations, ensuring that linguistic diversity remains an essential part of the Borok people's identity.

## 8. Conclusion

The linguistic diversity of Kokborok, reflected in its various dialects, is a vital part of the cultural heritage of the Borok people. While the Agartala dialect has gained prominence due to its use in education, administration, and media, other dialects remain equally significant in preserving the full spectrum of Kokborok's linguistic identity. The study of phonetic, lexical, morphological, and syntactic variations across dialects highlights the rich complexity of the language and the need for comprehensive research and documentation.

External influences from Bengali, Hindi, and English, coupled with migration, urbanization, and educational policies, have contributed to shifts in Kokborok dialects. While standardization has facilitated communication and academic development, it has also led to the marginalization of certain dialectal forms. Without active documentation and preservation efforts, many unique linguistic features risk disappearing over time.

To ensure the survival and vitality of Kokborok dialects, a multi-faceted approach is needed. This includes:

- Conducting systematic linguistic research on dialectal variations.





- Integrating dialectal awareness into educational curricula.
- Leveraging digital technology for language documentation and dissemination.
- Encouraging community participation in language preservation initiatives.

By recognizing the value of dialectal diversity and implementing strategies to safeguard it, Kokborok can continue to thrive as both a spoken and written language. Preserving its dialects will not only strengthen the linguistic and cultural identity of the Borok people but also contribute to the broader efforts of indigenous language sustainability worldwide.

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