Phonological and Grammatical Features of Kokborok: A Comparative Study with Garo

Dr. Pritilata Debbarma

Ex – Guest Faculty, Department of Kokborok, Tripura University, Tripura, India, 799022,

Nelson Debbarma

Member, Kokborok Translation Team, Tripura University, Tripura, India, 799022

pritilatadebbarma@gmail.com

ARTICLE DETAILS	ABSTRACT
	Kokborok, the native language of the Tripuri people in the North East Indian state of Tripura, belongs to the Bodo-Garo sub-group of the Tibeto-Burman branch under the Sino-Tibetan language family. Closely related languages within this sub-group include Garo, spoken primarily in Meghalaya. This journal undertakes a comparative linguistic study focusing on the phonological and grammatical features of Kokborok and Garo. The analysis identifies core elements such as vowel and consonant inventories, syllable structures, word order, verb morphology, and the use of case markers and classifiers. While both languages share a typological foundation characteristic of the Bodo-Garo group—such as subject-object-verb word order and agglutinative morphology—they also exhibit distinct features due to divergent geographic, cultural, and contact-induced developments. The findings aim to contribute to the broader understanding of Tibeto-Burman linguistics and support ongoing efforts in the preservation, standardization, and academic development of Kokborok. This comparative approach also highlights the significance of indigenous languages in Northeast India and their role in shaping cultural and

linguistic identities.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Kokborok is the principal language of the Tripuri people in the North-East Indian state of Tripura and is recognized as one of the official languages of the state. It is classified under the Bodo-Garo subgroup of the Tibeto-Burman branch, which is part of the larger Sino-Tibetan language family. Other languages in this subgroup include Bodo, Garo, Hajong, Dimasa, Chutiya, Mech, Kuch, Rabha and Naga diatects are spoken across various north-eastern states of India. These languages share typological similarities such as agglutinative morphology, subject-object-verb (SOV) word order, and rich classifier systems.

For examples: Ang mai chao (sov) In Kokborok (Present Tens), Anga mi Chajok (sov) means – I eat rice (svo)

Garo, primarily spoken in Meghalaya, particularly in the Garo Hills, Tura is another major representative of the Bodo-Garo sub-group. While Kokborok and Garo share a common linguistic ancestry, centuries of geographical separation and differing socio-political contexts have led to notable variations in their phonological and grammatical systems.

1.2 Purpose and Scope

The purpose of this study is to conduct a comparative analysis of the phonological and grammatical structures of Kokborok and Garo. It focuses on core linguistic features such as phoneme inventories, syllable patterns, sentence structures, verb morphology, use of case markers, and classifiers. By doing so, the study seeks to highlight the similarities that reflect their shared origin and the differences that reveal the effects of linguistic evolution and regional influence.

This analysis does not aim to provide an exhaustive grammar of either language but rather a focused comparison of key structural aspects. It draws upon available descriptive linguistic sources and comparative studies within the Bodo-Garo group.

1.3 Significance of the Study

This comparative study holds significance both linguistically and culturally. From a linguistic perspective, it contributes to the relatively under-researched domain of comparative Tibeto-Burman studies in South Asia. For the Kokborok-speaking community, such documentation is vital for language development, especially in educational and literary contexts, where standardization and enrichment of the language are ongoing goals.

Culturally, the study underscores the deep historical and ethnic connections between the Tripuri and Garo communities, promoting a shared understanding of indigenous identity. The findings also have potential implications for language policy, especially in multi-ethnic and multilingual settings like Northeast India, where language plays a crucial role in education, governance, and cultural preservation.

2. Literature Review:

2.1 Overview of the Bodo-Garo Language Family:

The Bodo-Garo sub-group is a well-recognized branch of the Tibeto-Burman family within the Sino-Tibetan language phylum. It encompasses languages spoken predominantly in North-East India, Bangladesh, and parts of eastern Nepal. Major languages in this group include Bodo, Garo, Kokborok, Dimasa, Hajong and Tiwa. These languages are united by common phonological and grammatical features such as a subject-object-verb (SOV) word order, post positions, agglutinative verb structures, and extensive use of numeral classifiers.

Historically, the Bodo-Garo languages are believed to have originated from a common ancestral language, with linguistic divergence shaped by geographical separation, cultural shifts, and varying degrees of contact with Indo-Aryan languages like Bengali and Assamese.

2.2 Previous Studies on Kokborok and Garo:

Linguistic studies on Kokborok have gradually increased since its official recognition in Tripura in the late 20th century. Descriptive grammars, dictionaries, and academic analyses have contributed to understanding its sound system, morphology, and syntax. Notable contributions include works by Suniti Kumar Chatterji and the Kokborok language development efforts led by Tripura University and local scholars. These studies emphasize Kokborok's phonemic inventory, agglutinative verb patterns, and its developing orthographic standard using both Roman and Bengali scripts.

Garo has received more consistent linguistic attention, with several grammars and socio-linguistic studies available. Research by scholars such as Stuart N. Wolfenden and more recent documentation by the North-Eastern Hill University (NEHU) has helped establish a detailed understanding of Garo's phonology and morphology. Garo has a relatively stable writing system using the Roman script and is taught in schools, colleges and University across Meghalaya.

Despite progress in both languages, there is limited comparative analysis between Kokborok and Garo, especially with regard to their core grammatical and phonological features. Most existing literature treats them in isolation, leaving a gap in understanding their inter-related structures and evolutionary differences.

2.3 Research Gaps:

While individual linguistic studies on Kokborok and Garo exist, few have attempted a direct comparative study of their phonological and grammatical systems. This gap limits broader insight into how these languages have evolved from their shared roots and how language contact and policy have influenced their development. Additionally, given the dynamic socio-linguistic environments of Tripura and Assam, Bangladesh, Meghalaya—marked by multi- and language shift—there is a pressing need to understand the structural robustness of these indigenous languages.

This study addresses these gaps by offering a structured, side-by-side comparison of Kokborok and Garo, contributing not only to theoretical linguistics but also to practical applications in language education and preservation.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a descriptive and comparative linguistic approach to examine the phonological and grammatical features of Kokborok and Garo. It is qualitative in nature, relying on secondary sources such as published grammars, linguistic articles, academic theses, and official language development documents. The purpose is not to conduct fieldwork or introduce new empirical data but to synthesize and compare existing knowledge in a structured academic format.

3.2 Sources of Data:

Data for Kokborok has been collected from descriptive linguistic works, dictionaries, and materials produced by Tripura University, Library of TTAADC, Khumulwng and other language development bodies. Additional resources include publications from the Kokborok Sahitya Sabha, Sahitya Akademy and Kokborok Hukumu Mission, governmental language policy documents, and educational texts.
For Garo, the study draws from grammars and linguistic papers developed by the North-Eastern Hill University (NEHU), missionary grammars from the colonial period, and current educational materials used in Meghalaya. Phonological inventories, sentence constructions, and morphological rules are extracted from these sources for comparative purposes.

All linguistic features referenced in this journal are drawn from credible academic publications and reviewed materials to ensure accuracy and consistency.

3.3 Comparative Approach:

The analysis follows a feature-by-feature comparison method. This involves identifying and outlining the phonological and grammatical features of Kokborok, followed by a direct comparison with those of

Garo under the same category. Comparative tables and descriptive commentary are used to highlight points of convergence and divergence.

Key linguistic categories compared include Kokborok and Garo:

Vowel and consonant inventories in Kokborok and Garo:

- In the Kokborok language, a syllable is typically composed of a vowel, often accompanied by a consonant. Kokborok has six vowels' phonemes (/i, u, e, w, o, a/) and various consonant sounds. The basic structure of a syllable in Kokborok is typically CV(Consonant-Vowel).
- Garo has only five distinctive simple vowels. These are conveniently and reasonably written as i, e, a, o, u. Only the first of these raises any real complications. /i/.
- There are 21 consonants in Garo Language, b, c, d, f, g, h, j, k, l, m, n, p, q, r, s, t, v, w, x, y, z.

Syllable structure and phonetics:

- Kokborok words are built around a basic syllable structure of (CV), allowing for both open (ending in a vowel) and closed (ending in a consonant) syllables.
- Consonant Clusters:
  While some consonant clusters exist, they are not as prevalent as in some other languages. The preference for simpler syllable structures is a characteristic of Tibeto-Burman languages.
- Vowels:
  Kokborok has both short and long vowels, which can change the meaning of a word.
- Tunes:
  Kokborok is a tonal language, meaning the pitch of a vowel can affect the meaning of a word. There are two main tones: high and low.
- Diphthongs:
  Kokborok also has diphthongs, which are combinations of two vowel sounds within a single syllable, such as "wi" and "ui".
- In the Garo language, syllables typically follow a structure of an initial consonant or a combination of these. The glottal stop also plays a significant role, sometimes being considered the four components of the syllable, especially in certain dialects.

- Detailed Explanation:
- Initial Consonant(C): Syllables can begin with a consonant or a cluster of consonants. Example: Mahchok (Deer) (C)V (cluster C) V(C)
- Central Vowel (V): Every syllable must have a vowel. Example: (C)V(C)
- Final Consonant (C): Syllables can end with a Consonant or a glottal stop.
- Glottal Stop (?): the glottal stop is a unique feature in Garo, acting as a syllable – final consonant or even a distinct component of the syllable in certain dialects. Examples: a- chak (foot): in northern dialects, this is pronounced "ja? -a"

Sentence structure (word order, clause formation):

- Kokborok, a Tibeto-Burman language, generally follows a Subject-Object–Verb (SOV) word order. It also utilizes suffixes to modify verb meanings, including tense, aspect, and other grammatical functions. Clause formation in Kokborok involves the use of conjunctions and other markers to connect clauses and create complex sentences.
- Word Order:
- SOV:
  Kokborok sentences typically arrange words in the order of Subject-Object–Verb (SOV).
  Examples:
  "Khumbarti mai chao". (Khumbarti eat rice) Subject (Khumbarti), Object (mai) Verb (chao).
- Verb Morphology:
- Suffixes: Kokborok uses a rich system of suffixes attached to verbs to indicate tense, aspect, and other grammatical functions.
- Examples:
- "-o/di" for present action "chao"(eat), "chadi" (eat)
- "-kha" for past action, "chakha" (eatten)
- "-nai" for future action, "chanai" (will eat)
- Verb Phrases: Kokborok verb phrases can be quite, with multiple suffixes added to the verb root to convey complex meanings.
- Clause Formation:
- Conjunctions: Conjunctions are used to connect clauses, forming more more comlex sentences
- Subordinate Clauses: Kokborok allows for the formation of subordinate clauses, which depend on the main clause for their meaning.
- Examples:
- "Nini mung tamo?" (What is your name?) – Question
- "Ang mai chaya" (I do not eat rice?)) – negative sentence.

- Garo sentences typically follow a Subject - Object –Verb (SOV) structure, where the subject comes first, followed by the object, and then the verb. However, there's some flexibility, especially within noun phrases, with numerals and simple modifiers potentially preceding or following the noun.
  1. Subject - Object –Verb (SOV) structure: "Anga mi cha-aha". (I have eatten rice). "Anga' is the subject (I), "mi" is the object (rice) , and "cha..-aha" is the verb (have eatten).
  Sentence with a locative: Example: "Ang –ni pi -sa nok –o –cha –a" (My child is eating at the house) here, "ang –ni pi-sa" is the subject (my child) , "cha.a" is the verb (is eating), and "nok.o" is the locative phrase (at the house).
  Sentence with a numeral: "Ang-ni mang –git –tam ma\'-su" (My three cows) "Ang-ni" is the possessive pronoun (my), "ma\'-su" is the noun (cows), and "man-git-tam" is the numeral (three).

Equational sentence: "U-a me\'-chik Bang –la- desh-ni" (That woman is a Bangladeshi). This type of sentence links tow noun phrases without a linking verb. "U-a" is the subject (That woman, and me\'-chik Bang-la-des-ni"is the object (a Bangladeshi).

*Verb morphology (tense, aspect, mood markers)
- Garo verbs are primarily modified by affixes to express tense, aspect, and mood. These affixes are added to the verb root, and some, like tense markers, must be suffixes. Verb morphology in Garo can also involve incorporating pronouns.
- Affixes:
  *Tense: Garo uses suffixes to indicate tense, including present, past, perfect, future, and immediate future.
  *Aspect: Affixes can also indicate aspect, such as habitual or continuing actions.
  * Mood: Mood, like irrealis, can be marked with suffixes to express conditional or past perfect senses.
- Verb Incorporation:
- Simple, Complex, and Compound Verbs:

- Use of classifiers and case markers in Kokborok Language:
  In Kokborok, both classifiers and case markers play crucier roles in sentence structure and meaning. Classifiers, often used with numerals, help to classify nouns based on characteristics like shape or category, while case markers indicate the grammatical role of a noun within a sentence.
- Classifiers:
- Function:
  Classifiers are affixes or words that are used with nouns, especially when counting, to specify the type or category of the noun. They help to distinguish between different types of objects.
- Placement:
- Classifiers typically precede numerals and follow the noun. Forming a combined unit..
  Examples:
   Types: Kokborok has a variety of classifiers, including those for:
    - Humanities : "khorok-sa-" , "khorok-nwi" ,"khorok-tham"
    - Animals: "masa-", "mak-nwi", "mak-tham".
    - General category: "-kai-sa", "-kai-nwi ", "-kai-tham".
    - Time: " dam-sa "dam-nwi","dam-thami".
    - Round objects: "dul-sa",."dul-nwi",."dul-tham",.

- Khum barsa (one flower) – "bar" is the classifier for flowers.
- Musuk maknwi (two cow) – "ma" is the classifier for many animals.
- Case Markers:
- Purpose: To indicate the grammatical function of a noun within a sentence, such as subject, object or the object of a preposition.

- Placement: Case markers are suffixes that are added to the noun.
- Examples:
- "o" (nominative case markers) – marks the subject of a sentence.
- "bai" (instrumental case marker) marks the instrument used in an action.
- "ni" (ablative /genitive case marker) – indicates origin or possession.

Use of classifiers and case markers in Garo Language:

- In Garo language, both classifiers and case markers play crucial roles in shaping noun phrases. Classifiers are used with numerals to specify the nature of the thing being counted, while case markers indicate the grammatical role of a noun phrase within a sentence

-

    Classifiers:
    Purpose: Classifiers specify the type or size of the unit being counted, similar to how we might use different words for "a cup of tea" versus "a handful of rice.
    Types: Garo has a variety of classifiers, including those for:
    - Humanities : "ak-" or "sak-".
    - Animals: "mang-".
    - General category: "-ge".
    - Time: "rang-" or "chang-".
    - Round objects: "rong-".
    - Abstract concepts: "ming-".
    - Others specific categories: ro-kom-" (kinds, varieties). "kan-"(residual category).
    Usage: They are often used with numerals to indicate the quantity of the specific type of noun.
    - Examples: mang-sa (0ne dog); mang is the clasifer for animals.

    Rong –gi (two pots): Rong is the clasifer for round or glonu object.
    Ge –git –tam (three things): ge is a general clasifer used when no specific classier is available.
    Case Markers:
    Purpose: case markers signal the grammatical role of noun phrase, such as subject, object, or possessor.
    Usage: They are typically added to noun phrases, including pronouns, demonstratives, and nouns.
    Examples: -ko (accusative case): -ko -

The comparison aims to draw meaningful insights into both the shared linguistic heritage and the unique evolutionary paths of Kokborok and Garo, guided by both internal developments and external influences.

4. Phonological Features:

4.1 Vowel Inventory in Kokborok:

Kokborok has a relatively simple vowel system. It typically includes five primary vowels: /a/, /e/, /i/, /o/, /u/, and /w/. Some dialects also exhibit nasalized vowels, although these are not phonemically distinct in all varieties.

Garo also exhibits a five-vowel system: /a/, /e/, /i/, /o/, and /u/. Like Kokborok, nasalization is present but not always phonemically contrastive. Vowel length is generally not phonemic in either language.

Comparison: Both languages share an almost identical vowel inventory, which is a typical feature of Bodo-Garo languages. In Kokborok, there are six vowels. The consonant sound |w| is used in words such as "nwng" (you) and "chwng" (we). There are no significant diphthongs in the standard forms of either language, and vowel harmony is not a prominent feature.

4. 2. Consonant System of Kokborok and Garo:

Kokborok possesses a moderate inventory of consonants, comprising 20 consonant phonemes, including two semi-vowels. The inventory includes voiced and voiceless stops (/p/, /b/, /t/, /d/, /k/, /g/), nasals (/m/, /n/, /ŋ/), fricatives (/s/, /h/), and approximants (/l/, /r/, /w/, /j/). It also features aspirated consonants such as /ph/, /th/, /kh/, and /ch/, along with additional sounds like /ng/, /ua/, and /y/. Additionally, Kokborok employs two closing diphthongs, /ai/ and /wi/. The retroflex series is largely absent, distinguishing it from nearby Indo-Aryan languages like Bengali.

Garo has a similar consonant inventory, with some variations. It includes voiceless and voiced stops, nasals, and approximants, but the occurrence of aspirated stops is more common in Garo than in Kokborok. Additionally, certain Garo dialects exhibit a wider distribution of voiced fricatives.
Garo has an inventory of 21 consonants: b, c, d, f, g, h, j, k, l, m, n, p, q, r, s, t, v, w, x, y, z.

Comparison: Both languages maintain a symmetrical consonant system typical of Tibeto-Burman languages. However, Garo has a slightly more varied use of aspirated and fricative sounds, likely due to dialectal diversity and contact with Khasi and Assamese. Kokborok's phonology is more conservative in terms of consonant aspiration.

4.3 Syllable Patterns and Stress

Kokborok generally follows a CV (consonant-vowel) or CVC (consonant-vowel-consonant) syllable structure. The language avoids consonant clusters and complex codas. Stress in Kokborok is generally predictable, often falling on the penultimate syllable, although it is not phonemically distinctive.

Garo also prefers simple syllable structures such as CV and CVC, with a similar tendency to avoid consonant clusters. Stress is typically placed on the initial syllable of a word, though it can vary slightly depending on dialectal influences.

Comparison: Both Kokborok and Garo conform to a simple syllabic structure, promoting ease of pronunciation and learning. There are no tonal contrasts in either language, unlike many other Tibeto-Burman languages.

4.4 Tonal Aspects:

Kokborok is primarily a tonal language. It uses two distinct tones; level (normal) and high. The high tone is often marked by a glottal sound or the letter "h" after the vowel. While some research suggests a non-tonal variety in certain sub-groups or due to Bengali influence, the presence of tones is generally considered a defining characteristic of the language.

While Garo language is non-tonal in standard dialects, some regional dialects may show pitch variation. However, like Kokborok, tone is not phonemically contrastive.

Comparison: The absence of tonal distinction in both Kokborok and Garo—according to some researchers—sets them apart from many other Tibeto-Burman languages, such as Burmese or Karen. This feature simplifies phonological processing and may be the result of language contact and typological simplification.

5. Key Grammatical Features of Garo Language:

5.1 **Word Order (SOV):**
Garo follows a Subject–Object–Verb (SOV) word order, meaning the verb typically comes at the end of a sentence.

 Suffixing Language:
Garo utilizes suffixes to indicate grammatical information such as case, tense, and aspect. These suffixes are added to the end of words, making it a predominantly suffixing language.

 Pronouns:
Garo has distinct pronouns for all three persons—first, second, and third—in both singular and plural forms. It also distinguishes between inclusive and exclusive forms of "we," a common feature in many Tibeto-Burman languages.

 Noun Phrases:
Garo noun phrases can include a noun along with demonstratives, numerals, and modifiers. These elements are often marked with case markers and postpositions, contributing to syntactic clarity.

Kokborok follows a SOV (Subject–Object–Verb) word order, typical of Tibeto-Burman languages. Modifiers precede the head noun, and postpositions are used instead of prepositions.

Examples: "Bo mai chao" ("He eat rice ")

Garo also maintains a SOV (Subject–Object–Verb) word order. Like Kokborok, adjectives and demonstratives precede the noun, and postpositions are employed.

Examples: "Ang.a mi cha.a" ("I eat rice ")

Comparison: Both languages share the same syntactic word order and modifier-noun structure, reflecting their common genetic lineage within the Bodo-Garo group.

5.2 Verb Morphology in Kokborok and Garo:

Kokborok verb morphology involves adding suffixes to verb roots to indicate tense, aspect, mood, and negation. Common suffixes include **"-o"**, **"-di"**, **"-kha"**, and **"-nai"**, which typically represent the present, imperative, past, and future tenses, respectively.

Examples of Affixes and their Meanings:
Root Verb: Cha (to eat):
- Chao (Present Tense, "eat").
- Chakha (Past Tense, "eaten").
- Chanai (Future Tense, "will eat").

Garo is also agglutinative. It marks tense, aspect, and mood through suffixation. Unlike Kokborok, Garo sometimes includes auxiliary particles that function as aspectual markers.

Examples of Affixes and their Meanings:
- -aha: Past Tense.
- -a: Neutral tense (present or general).
- -gen:Future tense.
- -e, -e-ming, -e-min-a: Subordinating suffixes.
- -kon: "Perhaps, provably" (indicates doubt).

Comparison: Both languages rely on suffixation, but Garo may use auxiliary particles more consistently. Neither language marks gender or person on the verb.

5.3 Case Marking

Kokborok employs postpositions to mark syntactic roles like subject, object, and instrument.

Subject marker: bo ("he")

Instrumental: Bo da bai buphang tano.. ("He cut a tree with knife")

Garo also uses postpositional particles to indicate grammatical cases. The system is less elaborate than in some Indo-Aryan languages but efficient.

- Instrumental: -chi (Instrumental/ comitative) : shows the the instrument or means by which an action is performed, or a companion.
- -a (nominative) : used on monosyllabic pronouns. Nouns generally lack on overt nominative marker.
- -ko (accusative) : marks the object of a verb.

Comparison: Case marking in both languages is analytic, relying on postpositions rather than inflection. They show no ergative-absolutive alignment.

5.4 Classifiers and Numerals Kokborok and Garo:

Kokborok uses numeral classifiers when counting nouns. Classifiers are inserted between the numeral and the noun and vary depending on the noun's shape, size, or types

Examples:
- Humanities : "khorok-sa-" , "khorok-nwi" ,"khorok-tham"
- Animals: "masa-", "mak-nwi", "mak-tham".
- General category: "-kai-sa", "-kai-nwi ", "-kai-tham".
- Time: " dam-sa "dam-nwi","dam-thami".
- Round objects: "dul-sa",."dul-nwi",."dul-tham",.

Garo also uses classifiers in numeral constructions, and its classifier system is similarly extensive.
  Types: Garo has a variety of classifiers, including those for:
- Humanities : "ak-" or "sak-".
- Animals: "mang-".
- General category: "-ge".
- Time: "rang-" or "chang-".
- Round objects: "rong-".
- Abstract concepts: "ming-".
- Others specific categories: ro-kom-" (kinds, varieties). "kan-"(residual category).
  Usage: They are often used with numerals to indicate the quantity of the specific type of noun.
- Examples: mang-sa (0ne dog); mang is the clasifer for animals.

  Rong –gi (two pots): Rong is the clasifer for round or glonu object.

Ge –git –tam (three things): ge is a general clasifer used when no specific classier is available.

Comparison: The use of classifiers is a strong feature of both languages, rooted in Tibeto-Burman linguistic tradition. Both systems are complex and category-specific.

6. Discussion and Analysis

6.1 Linguistic Convergence and Divergence

The comparative study of Kokborok and Garo reveals a high degree of linguistic convergence, affirming their shared lineage within the Bodo-Garo sub-group of the Tibeto-Burman language family. Both languages exhibit:

Similar phonological inventories

These features reflect common structural foundations and suggest a stable core grammar maintained through generations, despite geographical and political separations.

However, linguistic divergence is also evident. Garo, influenced by greater Christian missionary engagement and Roman script adoption, exhibits more lexical borrowings from English and Khasi. Kokborok, situated in Tripura and historically in contact with Bengali, shows Indo-Aryan influences in vocabulary and intonation patterns. Garo's auxiliary usage in verb morphology is more developed compared to Kokborok's reliance on suffixation alone. These distinctions point to separate paths of language contact and socio-cultural integration.

6.2 Script and Orthography Issues

Garo has largely standardized the Roman script, which is widely accepted and used in education, literature, and digital communication. This uniformity has supported the development of dictionaries, textbooks, and a broad range of publications in Garo.

Kokborok, however, remains caught in script debates. While both Roman and Bengali scripts are used, there is no state-wide consensus. Some institutions advocate for the Roman script (especially for digital use and linguistic clarity), while others promote Bengali script due to administrative and historical ties. The lack of standardization hampers educational development and orthographic consistency.

This script duality in Kokborok reflects larger issues of identity, governance, and modernization. It also creates challenges for learners and educators, unlike the Garo case where script uniformity has accelerated language planning.

6.3 Sociolinguistic Factors and Language Policy

In Tripura, Kokborok has been officially recognized since 1979 and is taught in schools up to the secondary level. Despite this, its functional use in administration, media, and higher education remains limited. Tripura University has taken key steps to promote Kokborok linguistics, but broader governmental support is inconsistent.

In Meghalaya, Garo enjoys a relatively stronger institutional presence. It is one of the associate official languages, used in education and regional administration. NEHU (North-Eastern Hill University) has a dedicated department for Garo studies. These factors contribute to greater intergenerational transmission and public use of Garo.

Both languages face pressures from dominant regional languages—Bengali in Tripura, and Khasi and English in Meghalaya. However, the degree of policy implementation and community mobilization differs, giving Garo a more sustained developmental trajectory.

6.4 Implications for Language Preservation and Development:

The comparison highlights the urgent need for:
(I) Orthographic standardization in Kokborok to unify language education and digital adaptation
(ii) Expanded institutional support for both languages, particularly in higher education and governance
(iii) Cross-linguistic research and resource sharing among Bodo-Garo languages to strengthen collective language vitality
(iv) The shared linguistic heritage between Kokborok and Garo offers potential for mutual intelligibility tools, joint cultural initiatives, and collaborative curriculum development. Given the increasing threat of language shift, these measures could bolster language resilience in both communities.

7. Conclusion

This journal has explored the linguistic structure of Kokborok in comparison with Garo, two closely related languages under the Bodo-Garo branch of the Tibeto-Burman language family. The comparative analysis reveals striking structural similarities in phonology, grammar, and syntax, under scoring a shared linguistic heritage rooted in common ancestry. Both languages exhibit SOV word order, agglutinative verb morphology, postpositions, and the use of numeral classifiers—core typological features of the Bodo-Garo group.

Nevertheless, divergences arise due to differing socio-political and cultural trajectories. While Garo has achieved relatively greater standardization and institutional support—particularly in script usage, educational access, and digital representation—Kokborok continues to grapple with unresolved issues such as script standardization and limited functional domains in governance and higher education.

The comparative lens also sheds light on broader socio-linguistic factors influencing language vitality. The absence of tonal distinctions in both Kokborok and Garo challenges general assumptions about

Tibeto-Burman languages, while their morphological simplicity offers opportunities for curriculum design and language acquisition.

In sum, this comparison not only highlights the structural kinship between Kokborok and Garo but also illustrates how policy, planning, and community engagement can influence language development. There is great potential for collaborative efforts across Bodo-Garo languages—efforts that could include joint orthographic initiatives, teacher training, curriculum sharing, and digital content creation. Institutions like Tripura University and NEHU have key roles to play in this vision.

Preserving and promoting Kokborok requires both academic commitment and grass roots participation. Insights drawn from Garo's developmental path can offer valuable lessons for shaping the future of Kokborok as a modern language of instruction, culture, and identity.

References

1. Burling, R. (1998). *The Tibeto-Burman languages of Northeast India*. Pacific Linguistics.

2. Debbarma, P. (2004). *A descriptive grammar of Kokborok*. Tripura University Press.

3. Debbarma, R. K. (n.d.). *Kokborok kokmakwtal*. Upajati Gabesana Kendra, Government of Tripura.

4. Debnath, R. (2014). *Kokborok – language origin & development*. Language Wing, Education Department of TTAADC.

5. Garo Language Development Board. (2015). *Garo language grammar and vocabulary*. Meghalaya Government Publication.

6. Jacquesson, F. (2008). *A Kokborok grammar*. Kokborok Tei Hukumu Mission.

7. Kharkongor, K. S. (1993). *The Garo language: Its phonology and grammar*. NEHU Press.

8. Roy, S. (2010). Language planning and policy in Tripura: A study of Kokborok. *International Journal of Dravidian Linguistics, 39*(2), 187–204.

9. Sarma, B. (2012). Comparative study of Bodo-Garo languages. *Linguistic Research Journal, 4*(1), 45–67.

10. Tripura State Language Policy. (2018). Department of Language, Government of Tripura.