



Evolution of the Kokborok Language: A Comparative Study of Kokborok and Dimasa

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the historical evolution and structural development of Kokborok through a comparative analysis with Dimasa, both belonging to the Bodo–Garo branch of the Tibeto-Burman of the Sino – Tibetan language family. By integrating diachronic reconstruction and synchronic comparison, the paper examines shared ancestry alongside modern divergence. A detailed reconstruction of selected Proto–Bodo–Garo forms is presented to highlight systematic sound correspondences between Kokborok and Dimasa. The study further compares phonological systems, morphological structures, and syntactic patterns to identify areas of continuity and innovation. While both languages retain core agglutinative structures and SOV word order, differences have emerged through phonological shifts, morphological simplification, and independent development. The findings demonstrate that Kokborok and Dimasa reflect parallel yet distinct evolutionary trajectories within the same linguistic lineage. By documenting both shared inheritance and contemporary differentiation, the study contributes to a clearer understanding of Bodo–Garo internal classification and the historical shaping of Kokborok.



1. Introduction

Kokborok and Dimasa are two major languages of Northeast India belonging to the Bodo–Garo branch of the Tibeto-Burman of the Sino - Tibetan language family. Despite their shared historical origin, both languages have developed distinct phonological, morphological, and syntactic characteristics over time. Kokborok is primarily spoken in Tripura, while Dimasa is spoken mainly in Assam and adjoining areas. Their geographical separation, sociopolitical histories, and patterns of language contact have contributed to independent linguistic evolution, even as they retain structural features inherited from a common Proto–Bodo-Garo ancestor.

The Bodo–Garo branch represents one of the most significant subgroups within the Tibeto-Burman family, characterized by agglutinative morphology, SOV word order, tonal or pitch-based distinctions, and the use of postpositions. Within this branch, Kokborok and Dimasa share numerous cognate forms, parallel grammatical structures, and comparable tense–aspect systems. However, systematic phonological shifts and morphological adjustments have gradually differentiated the two languages.

This study aims to examine the evolution of Kokborok through a comparative framework that integrates diachronic reconstruction and synchronic structural analysis. By reconstructing selected Proto–Bodo-Garo forms and establishing sound correspondences between Kokborok and Dimasa, the research identifies patterns of retention, innovation, and divergence. The structural comparison further explores differences in phonology, morphology, and syntax to assess how each language has adapted within its sociolinguistic environment.

Rather than treating Kokborok and Dimasa as dialectal variants, this study recognizes them as historically related but structurally distinct languages. The objective is not to privilege one language over the other, but to provide a balanced account of their shared inheritance and independent development. Through systematic comparison, the paper contributes to broader discussions on internal classification within the Bodo–Garo branch and deepens understanding of Kokborok’s grammatical evolution.

2. Historical Background and Proto–Bodo-Garo Reconstruction

The Bodo–Garo branch of the Tibeto-Burman language family comprises several languages spoken across Northeast India and adjoining regions, including Kokborok, Dimasa, Bodo, Garo, and others. Linguistic reconstruction suggests that these languages evolved from a common ancestral language generally referred to as Proto–Bodo-Garo (PBG). This proto-language likely developed within the



broader Tibeto-Burman dispersal pattern and later diversified through migration, ecological adaptation, and socio-political separation.

In addition to linguistic evidence, the Tripuri people preserve traditional oral narratives that reflect a shared ancestry with the Dimasa people. According to a well-known oral tradition, the ancestors of the Kokborok-speaking Tripuri people and the Dimasa people were two royal brothers, princes born to the same king and queen. Over time, the two brothers became separated, eventually establishing distinct kingdoms and communities.

This tradition has been passed down orally from generation to generation and remains an important part of the historical memory of both communities. One popular saying associated with this narrative states that “one half of a sword remains with the Tippera Kingdom, while the other half remains with the Dimasa Kingdom.” The symbolic division of the sword is often interpreted as representing a common origin followed by historical separation.

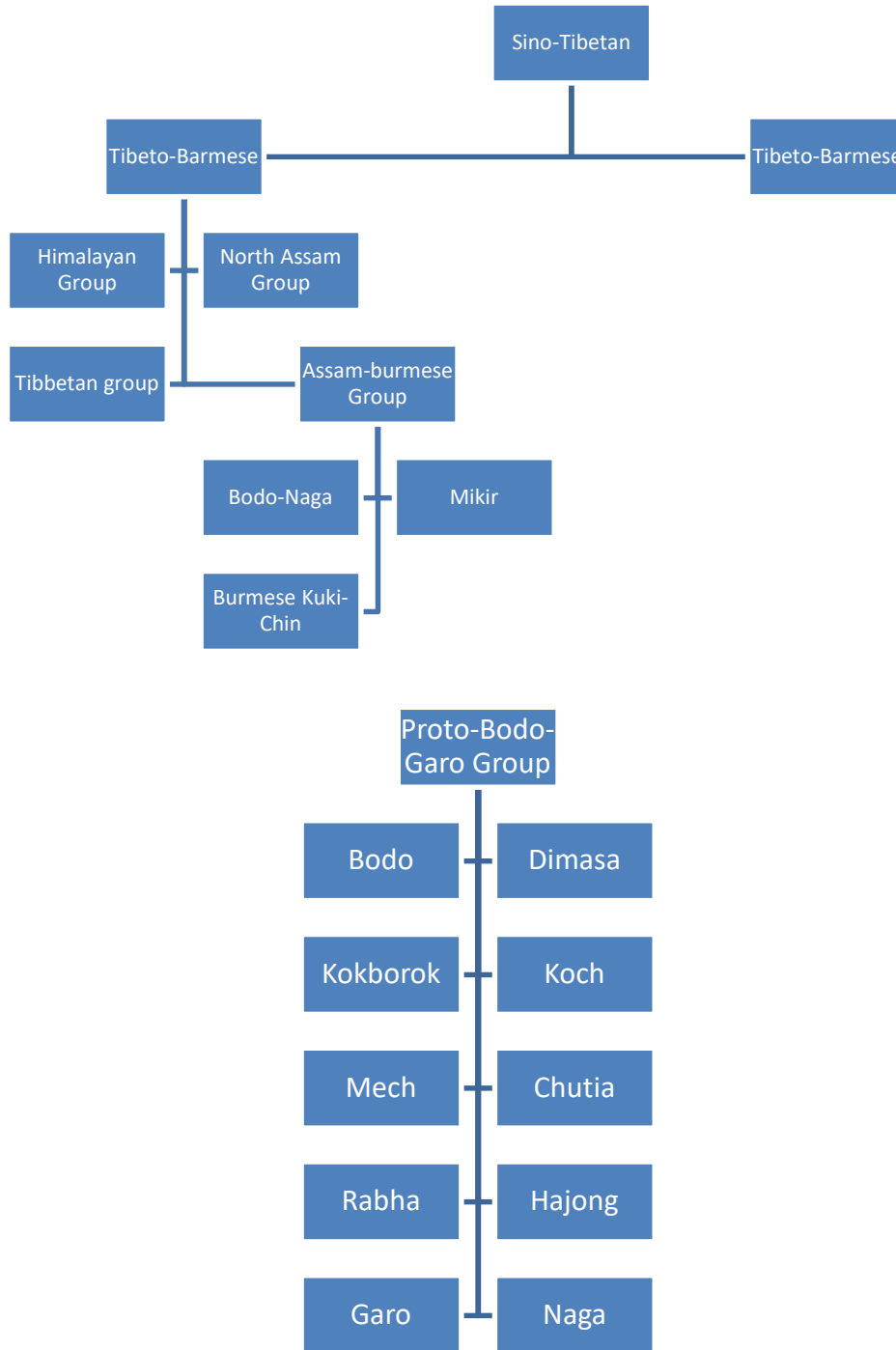
According to local tradition, the Dimasa Kingdom, whose historical remnants can still be seen at Khaspur, eventually declined and now survives only through its archaeological remains. In contrast, the royal heritage of the Tippera Kingdom continues to be represented by Ujjayanta Palace in Agartala, which stands as an enduring symbol of Tripura's royal history.

Historical records indicate that at various periods the Tippera Kingdom exercised influence over territories extending beyond present-day Tripura, including areas corresponding to modern Silchar, Rangamati, Khagrachhari, Noakhali, Bandarban, and Comilla. These historical connections have contributed to cultural and linguistic interactions across the wider region and may have played a role in the diversification of related Bodo–Garo languages.

Kokborok and Dimasa represent two significant descendants of this proto-language. While both languages preserve numerous inherited features, their divergence reflects systematic phonological change, lexical innovation, and independent grammatical development. The reconstruction of Proto–Bodo-Garo forms allows identification of regular sound correspondences that clarify the historical relationship between the two languages.



Sino-Tibetan Language Family Relation with Kokborok And Dimasa Language



2.1 Proto–Bodo-Garo Sound Correspondences

Comparative reconstruction reveals consistent phonological correspondences between Kokborok and Dimasa. Selected examples illustrate regular patterns of development:



Proto–Bodo-Garo	Kokborok	Dimasa	Gloss
*ti	twi	di	water
*mai	mai	mai	rice
*ba	ba	ba	father
*nok	nok	nok	house
*si	si	shi	wet

Several trends emerge from these correspondences:

1. Proto *t often develops into **twi** in Kokborok when followed by high vowels, whereas Dimasa frequently retains or voices the consonant (e.g., *ti → twi / di).
2. Proto *s may remain stable in Kokborok but shift toward a palatalized or fricative form in Dimasa (e.g., *si → si / shi).
3. Proto *k and *b tend to remain stable in both languages, indicating conservative retention of certain consonantal features.

These patterns demonstrate that Kokborok and Dimasa maintain regular correspondences rather than sporadic similarities, reinforcing their classification within the same branch.

2.2 Tonal Development

Proto–Bodo-Garo is generally reconstructed as having limited tonal contrast, possibly arising from earlier consonantal distinctions. Over time, tone became more systematically developed in descendant languages. Kokborok maintains a relatively simple tonal system (primarily high and low distinctions), whereas Dimasa exhibits more clearly differentiated pitch contours in certain lexical items.

The divergence in tonal realization suggests independent phonological evolution following separation. While both languages preserve tonal contrast, the phonetic realization and distribution of tone differ, reflecting internal innovation rather than direct borrowing.

2.3 Morphological Retention and Innovation

Proto–Bodo-Garo is generally reconstructed as an agglutinative language with suffix-based marking of tense, aspect, and grammatical relations. Both Kokborok and Dimasa have retained many of these structural features, reflecting their common ancestry within the Bodo–Garo branch of the Tibeto-Burman



language family. However, each language has undergone its own process of morphological simplification and innovation, resulting in distinct grammatical patterns.

For example, tense markers reconstructed from Proto–Bodo-Garo roots show conservative retention in both languages, although their surface forms differ slightly due to phonological change. These differences illustrate the parallel preservation of inherited morphology alongside gradual phonetic divergence.

i. Nouns and Pronouns

Both Kokborok and Dimasa nouns may be modified through the use of prefixes and suffixes to indicate plurality, case relations, and possession.

Classifiers:

Both languages employ bound nominal classifiers that occur with numerals to classify humans, animals, and objects. These classifiers typically precede the numeral and form an important component of noun phrase structure.

Possession in Kokborok:

Possessive markers function as prefixes attached to the noun stem.

- *pha* = father
- *A-pha* = Apha (my father), where *A-* derives from *ani* (I, first person)
- *Nw-pha* = Nwpha (your father), where *Nw-* derives from *nwng* (you, second person)
- *Bu-pha* = Bupha (his/her father), where *Bu-* derives from *bo* (he/she, third person)

Possession in Dimasa:

Possessive markers similarly function as prefixes.

- *ma* = mother
- *A-ma* = Ama (my mother), where *A-* derives from *angni* (I, first person)
- *Na-ma* = Nama (your mother), where *Na-* represents the second-person possessive marker
- *Bu-ma* = Buma (his/her mother), where *Bu-* derives from the third-person pronoun

**Pluralization:**

Plurality in Kokborok is commonly marked through suffixes such as *-rog* and *-song*.

Examples:

- *mokol* (eye) → *mokolrog* (eyes)
- *ata* (brother) → *atasong* (brothers)

In Dimasa, plurality is expressed through suffixes such as *-rao*, *-si*, and *-bur*, depending on the noun class and dialect.

Examples:

- *amai* (my mother) → *amai-rao* (mothers)
- *bwsah* (child) → *bwsah-rao* (children)

Number and Gender:

Both languages primarily mark plurality through affixation. In Kokborok, the suffix *-rog* is widely used, whereas Dimasa often employs plural markers restricted to nouns denoting humans and highly animate entities.

Case Marking:

Dimasa possesses approximately eight overt case markers. The nominative case is generally unmarked, whereas accusative, instrumental, and locative relations are indicated through clitics attached to nouns.

Kokborok likewise exhibits a rich case-marking system. For example:

- *chwla* = boy
- *chwla-no* = to the boy

In Dimasa, the plural suffix *-rao* is typically restricted to nouns with human reference. Inanimate nouns are generally not pluralized using this marker.



ii. Verb Morphology

Verb morphology in Kokborok is considerably more complex than noun morphology. Most verbal roots are monosyllabic, and grammatical categories such as tense, aspect, direction, causation, and completion are expressed through suffixation.

Tense and Aspect in Kokborok:

- *thang* = to go
- *thang-kha* = went (past tense)
- *thang-nai* = will go / future action
- *thang-o* or *thang-wi* = is going / present or continuous action

Agglutinative Word Formation:

Kokborok permits the stacking of multiple morphemes within a single lexical item.

Example:

Ma-thang-liya-na-ta = “have not been able to go”

Morphological breakdown:

- *Ma-* = negative marker
- *thang* = go
- *-liya* = able to
- *-na* = action marker
- *-ta* = emphatic marker

iii. Agglutination and Compounding in Dimasa

Dimasa, another member of the Bodo–Garo subgroup, is likewise highly agglutinative. Although many roots are monosyllabic, complex lexical items are formed through compounding, prefixation, and suffixation.



Compound Nouns:

- *Di-ma-sa* (children of the great river) — the ethnonym *Dimasa* itself is derived from:
 - *di* = water/river
 - *ma* = great/big
 - *sa* = child/children
- *Ma-grao* (mother tongue)
 - *ma* = mother/great
 - *grao* = speech/language
- *Di-lao* (long river)
 - *di* = river
 - *lao* = long

Verbal and Derivational Morphology:

- *Mzang-thai* (beauty/beautifulness)
 - *mzang* = beautiful
 - *-thai* = deverbal noun suffix
- *Mithima bao-ya-ba* (curious)
 - *mithima* = know
 - *bao* = forget
 - *-ya* = negative suffix
 - *-ba* = adjectival marker

These examples demonstrate the shared agglutinative heritage of Kokborok and Dimasa while highlighting the unique evolutionary developments that each language has undergone since their divergence from Proto-Bodo-Garo.



2.4 Divergence Through Geographic and Sociolinguistic Separation

Geographic separation between present-day **Tripura** and **Assam** played a significant role in the linguistic divergence of Kokborok and Dimasa. Migration patterns, settlement expansion, and the development of independent socio-political histories reduced sustained interaction between the two speech communities. As a result, sound changes, grammatical developments, and lexical innovations occurred independently in each language.

Kokborok came under the influence of **Bengali** and other neighboring languages, whereas Dimasa maintained closer contact with **Assamese** and other regional linguistic varieties. These distinct contact environments contributed to the differentiated phonological and lexical evolution of the two languages.

Lexical Borrowing in Kokborok from Bengali

A considerable number of Bengali words have entered everyday Kokborok usage, sometimes replacing or coexisting with older indigenous terms. Examples include:

Kokborok (Current Usage)	Original Kokborok	Bengali	Meaning
Kaka	Khra	Kaka	Uncle
Kaki	Khri	Kaki	Aunt
Jetha	Yong	Jetha	Elder paternal uncle

Lexical Borrowing in Dimasa from Assamese

Similarly, Dimasa has adopted a number of Assamese words that have become integrated into daily speech.

Dimasa	Assamese	Meaning
Jekhai	Jekhai	Net
Selek	Selek	Saliva
Bekur	Bekur	Fungus
Pakghor	Pakghor	Kitchen

These examples illustrate how prolonged language contact has influenced the vocabulary of both Kokborok and Dimasa. While many inherited Proto-Bodo-Garo words remain intact, borrowed lexical



items have enriched the vocabulary and reflect the historical interactions of each speech community with neighboring linguistic groups.

Overall, the reconstruction of **Proto–Bodo–Garo** forms demonstrates that Kokborok and Dimasa share a systematic and traceable historical relationship. At the same time, regular sound change, independent linguistic development, and long-term socio-linguistic separation have produced the distinct phonological, morphological, and lexical characteristics that define the two languages today.

3. Phonological Comparison

The phonological comparison between Kokborok and Dimasa reveals both strong continuity from Proto–Bodo–Garo and clear evidence of independent sound change. While both languages retain a broadly similar segmental inventory and tonal foundation, systematic divergences are visible in consonant shifts, vowel development, and tonal realization.

3.1 Consonant Correspondences

Regular sound correspondences demonstrate patterned divergence rather than random variation. The following table illustrates selected consonantal correspondences:

Proto–Bodo–Garo	Kokborok	Dimasa	Gloss
*t	t / tw	d	water (<i>ti</i> → <i>twi</i> / <i>di</i>)
*th	thw	thi	die (<i>thi</i> → <i>thw</i> / <i>thi</i>)
*k	k	k	house (<i>nok</i> → <i>nok</i> / <i>nok</i>)
*b	b	b	father (<i>ba</i> → <i>ba</i> / <i>ba</i>)

Key Observations:

1. Proto *t often undergoes voicing in Dimasa, especially in intervocalic positions, while Kokborok retains the voiceless form or develops a glide (e.g., *ti* → *twi*).
2. Proto *th shows palatalization in Dimasa (*th* → *thi*), while Kokborok retains the alveolar fricative.
3. Velar stops (*k*) and bilabial stops (*b*) show strong retention in both languages, suggesting conservative inheritance in these segments.
4. Nasal consonants remain largely stable across both languages.



These correspondences indicate regular phonological development rather than lexical borrowing.

3.2 Vowel Development

Both Kokborok and Dimasa preserve a five-to-six vowel system characteristic of Bodo–Garo languages. However, vowel quality and distribution differ slightly.

Kokborok maintains a high back unrounded vowel /u/, which is a distinctive feature within its vowel system. Dimasa, in contrast, often merges or approximates this vowel toward /u/ or central vowels depending on phonetic environment.

For example:

- Proto *u → Kokborok /u/ in certain lexical items
- Proto *u → Dimasa /u/ (retained or slightly centralized)

This divergence suggests internal vowel restructuring within Kokborok while Dimasa remains comparatively conservative in high back vowel realization.

3.3 Tonal Comparison

Both languages display tonal contrast, but tonal complexity and distribution vary. Kokborok generally exhibits a simpler two-tone system (high vs. low), whereas Dimasa demonstrates clearer pitch contour variation and, in some analyses, more nuanced tonal contrasts.

The development of tone in both languages likely originates from earlier consonantal distinctions, a common pattern in Tibeto-Burman evolution. Over time, loss of voicing contrasts may have contributed to pitch differentiation.

Comparatively:

- Kokborok: Stable high/low tonal distinction with relatively moderate pitch contrast.
- Dimasa: Sharper tonal realization with clearer contour variation in lexical pairs.

These tonal differences suggest independent prosodic evolution following geographic separation.



3.4 Phonotactic Structure

Both Kokborok and Dimasa favour simple syllable structures (CV and CVC). Consonant clusters are limited in both languages, consistent with Proto–Bodo-Garo patterns.

However, Kokborok shows slightly more glide formation (e.g., tw-, kw-) in onset positions, while Dimasa tends to preserve simpler consonantal onsets. This may reflect internal phonological innovation in Kokborok.

3.5 Summary of Phonological Evolution

The phonological comparison demonstrates a combination of conservative retention and systematic divergence:

- Stable retention of core stop and nasal consonants.
- Regular voicing and palatalization shifts in Dimasa.
- Glide development and vowel restructuring in Kokborok.
- Independent tonal refinement in both languages.

These patterns confirm that Kokborok and Dimasa evolved from a shared Proto–Bodo-Garo system but underwent predictable and independent phonological changes over time.

4. Morphological Comparison

Morphologically, both Kokborok and Dimasa retain the agglutinative structure characteristic of the Bodo–Garo branch. Grammatical relations are primarily expressed through suffixation, with limited prefixation. Despite shared structural foundations, each language has developed distinct morphological realizations through phonological change, functional extension, and independent innovation.

4.1 Noun Morphology and Number Marking

Proto–Bodo-Garo is reconstructed as having plural marking through suffixes or quantificational particles. Both Kokborok and Dimasa continue this tradition, though their plural systems differ in form and frequency.

Kokborok frequently marks plurality contextually or through suffixes attached to animate nouns. In many cases, plural marking is optional when number is understood from context.



Dimasa, by contrast, tends to employ more consistently overt plural markers in certain syntactic environments. The form of the plural suffix differs phonologically due to regular sound shifts, but the structural principle remains parallel.

This suggests morphological continuity with slight divergence in surface realization and usage frequency.

4.2 Case Marking and Postpositional Structure

Both Kokborok and Dimasa maintain postpositional systems rather than prepositional ones, reflecting their shared inheritance from Proto-Bodo-Garo. Grammatical relations such as locative, genitive, accusative, and instrumental are generally expressed through particles, clitics, or suffixes attached to noun phrases.

Kokborok case markers are generally shorter and, in rapid speech, may undergo phonological reduction. Dimasa case markers, while structurally similar, often preserve clearer phonetic boundaries between the noun stem and the grammatical particle.

Case Marking in Dimasa

Dimasa possesses approximately eight overt case markers. The nominative case is typically unmarked (covert), whereas other grammatical relations, including the accusative, instrumental, and locative, are expressed through clitics attached to nouns. This system reflects the agglutinative nature of the language and its retention of inherited Tibeto-Burman morphological features.

Case Marking in Kokborok

Kokborok likewise exhibits a rich system of case marking. For example, the accusative or dative relation may be expressed through the suffix *-no*:

- *chwla* = boy
- *chwla-no* = to the boy

The attachment of case particles directly to noun stems demonstrates the language's agglutinative structure and parallels similar constructions found in other Bodo-Garo languages.



Plural Marking

Dimasa employs the plural suffix *-rao*, which is largely restricted to nouns denoting humans or highly animate entities. Inanimate nouns are generally not pluralized using this suffix. This feature is also found in varying forms across several related Bodo–Garo languages.

Overall, the similarities between Kokborok and Dimasa in their case-marking systems point to a common Proto–Bodo-Garo origin. The differences that exist are primarily phonological rather than structural, reflecting centuries of independent evolution and distinct patterns of morphophonemic integration.

4.3 Verb Morphology and Tense–Aspect Marking in Kokborok And Dimasa

One of the strongest areas of continuity between Kokborok and Dimasa is their verb morphology. Both languages employ suffix-based tense–aspect systems that can be traced back to Proto–Bodo-Garo structures. This shared morphological pattern provides important evidence for their common linguistic ancestry.

For example, past tense markers in both languages appear to originate from a common proto-form, although their modern pronunciations differ due to regular phonological changes. Similarly, future tense markers perform comparable grammatical functions in both languages but display variations in vowel and consonant realization.

Verb Morphology in Kokborok

Verb morphology in Kokborok is considerably more complex than noun morphology. Most verbal roots are monosyllabic, and grammatical categories such as tense, aspect, direction, causation, and completion are expressed through suffixation.

Tense and Aspect Marking in Kokborok

Tenses are generally expressed through bound suffixes attached directly to the verb root. Examples include:

- *thang* = to go
- *thang-kha* = went (past tense)
- *thang-nai* = will go / future action



- *thang-o* or *thang-wi* = is going / present or continuous action

In this system, *-kha* functions as a past tense marker, *-nai* indicates future or continuing action, and *-o* or *-wi* marks present or progressive action.

Verb Morphology in Dimasa

Dimasa, another member of the Bodo–Garo subgroup of the Tibeto-Burman language family, is likewise highly agglutinative. Verbal constructions are formed through a combination of verbal roots and multiple suffixes, with occasional use of prefixes. Dimasa verbs are inflected for tense, aspect, mood, voice, and number, but generally do not mark person or gender.

Rather than relying on separate auxiliary verbs, Dimasa employs a rich system of post-verbal suffixes to express grammatical distinctions. This characteristic reflects a structural pattern shared with many other Bodo–Garo languages.

Comparative Perspective

Although Kokborok often exhibits somewhat simplified or phonologically reduced verb suffixes when compared with Dimasa, both languages preserve the same underlying grammatical framework inherited from Proto–Bodo-Garo. In both languages, tense and aspect are primarily expressed through agglutinative suffixation rather than through auxiliary constructions.

The similarities between the two systems demonstrate a high degree of morphological continuity, while the differences largely reflect independent phonological developments that occurred after the separation of the two speech communities. Consequently, verb morphology provides some of the strongest evidence for the historical relationship between Kokborok and Dimasa within the Bodo–Garo branch of the Tibeto-Burman language family.

4.4 Derivational Morphology

Derivational processes such as nominalization, causative formation, and verbal extension provide further evidence of the close historical relationship between Kokborok and Dimasa. Both languages primarily employ suffixation to derive nouns from verbs and to modify the semantic and grammatical functions of verbal roots.



In Kokborok, several derivational suffixes have undergone phonological shortening and simplification over time. Dimasa, by contrast, often preserves cognate forms that remain more phonetically transparent and closer to the reconstructed Proto–Bodo-Garo forms.

Derivational Suffixes in Kokborok

As an agglutinative language, Kokborok relies heavily on suffixation as a productive means of word formation. One of the most common derivational suffixes is {-nai}, which derives an agent noun from a verbal root, indicating the performer of an action.

Examples:

- *khuktang* = to read
khuktang-nai = reader
- *phwrwng* = to teach
phwrwng-nai = teacher

In these examples, the suffix *-nai* transforms the verbal root into a noun referring to the agent or doer of the action.

Derivational Processes in Dimasa

Dimasa, another member of the Bodo–Garo subgroup of the Tibeto-Burman language family, also exhibits a highly agglutinative morphological structure. New lexical items are formed primarily through compounding, prefixation, and suffixation. While compounding remains the most productive word-formation process, derivational affixes play a crucial role in changing word classes and modifying lexical meaning.

Core Word-Formation Processes in Dimasa

1. Compounding (Most Productive Process)

- **Noun + Noun:** Combines two nominal roots to create new lexical items, including kinship terms and descriptive nouns.
- **Verb + Verb:** Produces complex verbal predicates and extended meanings.



2. Derivational Affixation

- **Prefixation:** Adds morphemes to the beginning of lexical roots, often creating causative or modified meanings.
- **Suffixation:** Adds morphemes to the end of roots for nominalization, adjectival derivation, and adverbial modification.

Comparative Perspective

The comparison of derivational morphology in Kokborok and Dimasa demonstrates a shared Proto-Bodo-Garo inheritance. Both languages continue to rely heavily on agglutinative mechanisms for lexical expansion and grammatical derivation. However, Kokborok often exhibits greater morphophonemic compression and phonological reduction in derived forms, whereas Dimasa tends to preserve fuller and more transparent morphological structures.

These similarities indicate that the fundamental derivational mechanisms have remained largely intact despite centuries of linguistic separation, while the differences reflect independent phonological developments within each language.

4.5 Morphological Stability and Innovation

Overall, the morphological systems of Kokborok and Dimasa demonstrate a strong degree of historical continuity. Both languages have retained the core characteristics of the Proto-Bodo-Garo morphological system, including an agglutinative structure, extensive use of suffixation, and a basic Subject-Object-Verb (SOV) word order.

Examples:

- **Kokborok:** *Ang mai chao.* (SOV)
Meaning: “I eat rice.”
- **Dimasa:** *Ang ma-rong ziba.* (SOV)
Meaning: “I eat rice.”

These examples illustrate the shared syntactic framework of the two languages, in which the subject precedes the object and the verb occurs at the end of the sentence.

Despite their common structural foundation, certain areas of divergence can be observed:



- **Phonetic realization of suffixes:** Corresponding grammatical suffixes often exhibit different surface pronunciations due to independent sound changes.
- **Frequency of overt marking:** Some grammatical categories are marked more explicitly in one language than in the other.
- **Morphological simplification in Kokborok:** Kokborok shows a tendency toward phonological reduction and morphophonemic compression in certain suffixes and derived forms, whereas Dimasa often preserves fuller morphological structures.

These differences are relatively minor and do not affect the fundamental grammatical architecture shared by the two languages. Rather, they reflect gradual internal linguistic development, regional contact influences, and centuries of independent evolution following their separation from Proto–Bodo-Garo. Consequently, the morphological evidence strongly supports the close historical relationship between Kokborok and Dimasa while also highlighting the distinct evolutionary paths that each language has followed.

5. Syntactic Comparison

Syntactically, Kokborok and Dimasa exhibit strong structural continuity inherited from the Proto–Bodo-Garo branch of the Sino-Tibetan language family. Because they share a common ancestral language that is believed to have existed approximately 1,200–1,400 years ago, their fundamental syntactic structures remain highly comparable and display only minor morphological or contact-induced variations. Both languages are typologically head-final, follow a Subject–Object–Verb (SOV) word order, and rely heavily on postpositions and suffix-based grammatical marking. However, subtle differences in clause construction, negation patterns, and subordination strategies reveal the gradual divergence that has occurred through centuries of independent linguistic development.

5.1 Basic Word Order

Both Kokborok and Dimasa maintain canonical SOV structure:

- Kokborok: *‘Ang mai chao’*.(SOV) means ‘I eat rice’(SVO).
- Dimasa: *Ang mai za*.(SOV) means ‘I eat rice’(SVO).

In both languages, modifiers precede nouns, and auxiliary or tense markers follow the verb. This strict head-final alignment reflects stable retention of Proto–Bodo-Garo syntactic organization.



No significant deviation from SOV order is observed in either language, indicating strong structural conservatism.

5.2 Case Alignment and Argument Structure

Both languages display nominative–accusative alignment and rely on postpositional particles to indicate grammatical relations. Subjects are typically unmarked in neutral clauses, while objects may receive particles depending on definiteness or emphasis.

Dimasa tends to preserve clearer morphological marking of object relations in certain contexts, whereas Kokborok occasionally allows contextual interpretation without overt marking. This difference appears to reflect variation in usage frequency rather than syntactic restructuring.

5.3 Negation

Negation in both languages is formed through particles or suffixes attached to verbs. The position of negation markers is typically post-verbal or immediately preceding the verb, depending on the construction type. Kokborok often uses concise negation markers that may undergo phonological reduction in rapid speech. Dimasa retains cognate negation forms but may exhibit fuller phonetic articulation. Structurally, negation placement remains parallel across both languages, suggesting direct inheritance from the proto-system.

Both Kokborok and Dimasa are Sino-Tibetan languages belonging to the Bodo–Garo branch of the Tibeto-Burman language family. Because of this shared ancestry, they rely on similar syntactic structures, namely Subject + Object + Verb (SOV) sentence structures, but they employ distinctly different morphological markers for negation. Nevertheless, their negation systems are highly similar.

For examples: Ang + mai + cha + ya (I eat not rice), Subject + Object + Verb + Negative in Kokborok. In Dimasa, Ang + mai + za + ya (I eat not rice), Subject + Object + Verb + Negative.

- Past Tense Alternative: For past actions, *-liya* is sometimes combined with verbs (e.g., Ang khan + liya meaning “I do not hear”).
- Dimasa similarly relies on the post-verbal suffix *-ja*. Example: Nung thang-ja (you do not go/you will not go).
- Imperative Negation (Prohibition):



- To tell someone not to do something, both languages use a negative prefix before the verb.
- Kokborok typically uses the prefix *ta-* (often paired with the imperative suffix *-di*).
- Affirmative: Nwng thang-di (you go).
- Negative: Ta-thang-di (Do not go).
- Dimasa also utilizes a negative prefix, primarily *da-*, before the verb root to express prohibition.
- Example: Da-kha (Do not run).
- Negative Questions (Interrogative Negative)
- To ask a negative question, both languages use question-specific markers at the end of the clause or adapt the negative verb.
- Example: In Kokborok, Bo thang-liya-da? (Will he not go?).
- In Dimasa, Nang thang-ya? (Won't you go?).

5.4 Interrogative Formation

Yes–no questions in both languages are generally formed through intonation and question particles. Wh-questions maintain interrogative words in pre-verbal position, consistent with SOV syntax.

Dimasa may exhibit slightly more rigid particle usage in formal constructions, while Kokborok occasionally relies more heavily on intonation in informal contexts. However, the overall interrogative structure remains typologically aligned.

5.5 Subordination and Complex Clauses

Complex sentences in both languages utilize clause-final markers and connective particles. Subordinate clauses typically precede the main clause, maintaining head-final order.

Kokborok shows a tendency toward shorter subordinate constructions in everyday speech, possibly influenced by contact languages and stylistic simplification. Dimasa, in comparison, preserves longer embedded constructions in traditional narrative discourse.

Nevertheless, the underlying syntactic architecture remains structurally parallel.



5.6 Syntactic Stability and Divergence

The syntactic systems of Kokborok and Dimasa demonstrate remarkable stability relative to phonological change. Most divergence appears at the level of particle realization and usage frequency rather than deep structural transformation.

This suggests that syntax within the Bodo–Garo branch is more resistant to rapid change, while phonology and morphology exhibit more visible evolutionary shifts.

6. Selected Lexical Observations

Although lexical comparison is not the primary focus of this study, selected examples provide insight into shared inheritance and independent development within Kokborok and Dimasa. The majority of core vocabulary in both languages reflects clear Proto–Bodo-Garo ancestry, yet phonological change and semantic drift have produced distinct modern forms.

6.1 Core Cognates and Shared Vocabulary

Kokborok (spoken in Tripura) and Dimasa (spoken in Assam) are both Sino-Tibetan, Tibeto-Burman languages belonging to the Bodo–Garo branch. Because they share a strong ancestral root, they exhibit significant lexical overlap, with approximately 70–80% of their core vocabulary showing clear cognates.

A number of basic lexical items demonstrate direct cognacy between the two languages, confirming their common origin:

Proto–Bodo-Garo	Kokborok	Dimasa	Gloss
*mai	mai	mai	rice
*nok	nok	nok	house
*ba	ba	ba	father
*ti	twi	di	water

These examples show high lexical retention in fundamental vocabulary domains such as kinship, household terms, and staple food items. Sound correspondences such as $t \rightarrow tw / d$ illustrate regular phonological development rather than lexical borrowing.

1. Kokborok and Dimasa Words with the Same Pronunciation and the Same Meaning



Kokborok	Dimasa	Meaning
Ang	Ang	I / Ami
Ani	Ani	My / Amar
Ma	Ma	Mother / Ma
Mai	Mai	Paddy / Dhan
Buma	Buma	Her Mother / Tar Ma
Nwpha	Nwpha	Your Father / Tomar Baba
Nini	Nini	Your / Tomar
Misip	Misip	Buffalo / Mahish

2. Kokborok and Dimasa Words with Slight Differences in Pronunciation but the Same Meaning

Kokborok	Dimasa	Meaning
Bo	Boh	He/She / Se
Bini	Boni	His/Her / Tar
Ama	Amai	My Mother / Amar Ma
Bwsa	Bwsah	Her Child / Tar Santan
Mairum	Mairong	Rice / Chaul

3. Kokborok and Dimasa Words with Significant Differences in Pronunciation but the Same Meaning

Kokborok	Dimasa	Meaning
A	Na	Fish / Machh
Nono	Nungkhe	You / Tomake
Chwngno	Jungkhe	Us / Amaderke
Mai	Makham	Rice / Bhat
Kuphur	Guphur	White / Sada
Ano	Angkhe	Me / Amake
Bono	Bokhe	Him/Her / Tar
Angsa	Anisa	My Child / Amar Santan



Kokborok	Dimasa	Meaning
Thok	Thao	Oil / Tel

4. /Ch/ in Kokborok Becomes /J/ in Dimasa

Kokborok	Dimasa	Meaning
Chwng	Jwng	We / Amra
Chini	Jini	Our / Amader
Achai	Hajai	To Be Born / Janma Grahan
Chwngno	Jwngkhe	Us / Amader
Takhum Chwla	Daophlamdujwla	Male Duck / Purush Hash

5. /t/ in Kokborok Becomes /d/ in Dimasa, and /k/ in Kokborok Becomes /au/ in Dimasa

Kokborok	Dimasa	Meaning
Bwtwi	Bitih	Egg / Dim
Twi	Di	Water / Jal
Tok	Dau	Bird / Pakhi
Tokjwk	Daumak	Hen / Murgi
Takhum	Dauphlamdu	Male Duck / Purush Hash
Kolok	Glau	Long / Lamba
Thok	Thau	Oil / Tel
Solok	Salau	Loan / Rin
Norog	Narau	You (Plural) / Tomra
Khorok	Khurau	Head / Matha
Togla	Daula	Cock / Murga
		Crow / Kak
Thokha	Doukha	



6. Words with Significant Differences in Pronunciation but the Same Meaning in Kokborok and Dimasa

Kokborok	Dimasa	Meaning
Norog	Nisih	You (Plural) / Tomra
Norogno	Nisikhe	To You / Tomader
Borog	Bonshi	They / Tahara
Borogni	Bongsini	Their / Tader
Borok	Subum	Human / Manus
Bwrwi	Mwisaju	Woman / Stri
Okwra	Khura	Older Person / Briddha Byakti
Berama	Naphlam	Dry Fish / Shutki Machh

6.2 Divergence through Phonological Shift

Some lexical differences arise from systematic phonological shifts rather than independent lexical innovation. For instance, palatalization or voicing in Dimasa often produces surface variation while preserving shared roots.

Where Kokborok retains an alveolar fricative /s/, Dimasa may exhibit palatalized /sh/. Such changes maintain lexical continuity despite phonetic divergence.

6.3 Independent Lexical Innovation

Beyond inherited vocabulary, both languages have developed unique lexical items influenced by their respective regional contact environments. Kokborok has incorporated terms through contact with Bengali and neighbouring languages in Tripura, while Dimasa reflects lexical influence from Assamese and surrounding communities in Assam.

- **Kokborok Innovation:** It innovates new vocabulary by combining independent native morphemes. For example, for “aeroplane,” instead of borrowing from Hindi or English, the Kokborok word combines *bir* (to fly) and *khung* (cover) to form *Birkhung* (aeroplane). Similarly, *hor* (fire) and *khok* (box) combine to form *Horkhok* (matchbox).

- **Dimasa Innovation:** *Di-ma-sa* (sons/children of the great river), the name of the Dimasa people itself, is a compound formed from *di* (water/river), *ma* (big/great), and *sa* (child/children).



These borrowings and innovations are generally confined to domains such as administration, agriculture, and cultural exchange, while the core vocabulary of both languages remains historically grounded.

6.4 Lexical Stability and Identity

The limited divergence in core vocabulary indicates strong genealogical continuity within the Bodo–Garó branch. However, lexical adaptation reflects each language’s socio-cultural trajectory. Kokborok and Dimasa maintain mutual cognacy in essential lexical domains, yet their contact histories have shaped peripheral vocabulary differently.

The lexical evidence thus re-inforces a balanced view: both languages share deep historical roots while demonstrating independent pathways of innovation.

7. Socio-linguistic Reflections in

The structural comparison between Kokborok and Dimasa must be understood within their distinct socio-linguistic environments. Although both languages descend from Proto–Bodo–Garó, their evolutionary trajectories have been shaped by geographic separation, political boundaries, and differing contact influences.

Kokborok, spoken primarily in Tripura, has developed under sustained interaction with Bengali and other regional languages. This contact has influenced phonological adaptation, lexical borrowing, and minor morphological simplification. Dimasa, spoken largely in Assam, has evolved in closer interaction with Assamese and other neighbouring communities. These differing contact ecologies have contributed to the subtle structural distinctions observed between the two languages.

Despite these influences, both Kokborok and Dimasa retain strong internal grammatical coherence. Their shared agglutinative morphology, SOV syntax, and tonal distinctions reflect deep genealogical continuity. Structural resilience is particularly visible in their syntactic frameworks, which have remained largely stable despite phonological divergence.

At the same time, sociolinguistic factors such as educational policy, regional identity formation, and language standardization have reinforced their independent status. Kokborok has developed its own academic and literary trajectory within Tripura, while Dimasa has followed a separate path within Assam. This institutional differentiation further consolidates their modern distinctiveness.



Importantly, the comparison demonstrates that divergence between the two languages is systematic rather than fragmentary. Regular sound correspondences and parallel morphological systems confirm their shared origin, while predictable phonological shifts and lexical adaptation mark their independent evolution. The co-existence of continuity and divergence reflects a natural pattern of language development within a common genealogical branch.

Understanding this balance is crucial for accurate internal classification within the Bodo–Garo subgroup. Kokborok and Dimasa are neither dialectal variants of a single modern language nor entirely unrelated systems. Rather, they represent historically connected but independently evolving languages whose structural similarities and differences illuminate broader processes of linguistic change.

8. Conclusion

This study has examined the evolution of Kokborok through a comparative analysis with Dimasa, integrating both diachronic reconstruction and synchronic structural comparison. The findings demonstrate that both languages share a systematic and traceable ancestry within the Bodo–Garo branch of the Tibeto-Burman family. Regular sound correspondences, parallel agglutinative morphology, SOV syntactic alignment, and retained core vocabulary confirm their common Proto–Bodo-Garo origin.

At the same time, clear patterns of independent development have emerged. Phonological divergence—such as consonant voicing shifts, palatalization patterns, glide formation, and tonal differentiation—illustrates predictable sound change following geographic separation. Morphological and syntactic structures remain largely stable, yet subtle variation in surface realization and usage frequency indicates gradual internal evolution. Lexical adaptation further reflects distinct regional contact histories in Tripura and Assam.

The comparative evidence supports a balanced interpretation: Kokborok and Dimasa are historically related languages that have evolved independently over time. Their relationship is neither that of mere dialectal variants nor of loosely connected systems; rather, they represent parallel branches within a shared genealogical framework. The stability of their core grammatical systems alongside systematic phonological divergence highlights the dynamic yet orderly nature of language change.

By reconstructing selected Proto–Bodo-Garo forms and identifying consistent correspondences, this study contributes to clearer internal classification within the Bodo–Garo subgroup. More broadly, the comparison underscores the importance of documenting both shared inheritance and contemporary differentiation in understanding the historical evolution of Kokborok.

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