

# Allomorphs in Bodo : A Study on Bodo Grammar

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This study explores the phenomenon of allomorphy in the Bodo language, a member of the Tibeto-Burman branch of the Sino-Tibetan language family, spoken predominantly in the northeastern region of India. The research focuses on identifying and analyzing the various allomorphs present in Bodo, examining how their formation and usage are influenced by phonological, morphological, and historical factors. The study begins by categorizing the different types of allomorphs in Bodo, with a particular emphasis on those conditioned by phonological environments, such as nominative case markers and plural suffixes. It also investigates morphologically conditioned allomorphs, which are determined by specific grammatical categories, such as honorifics and personal pronouns. Additionally, the research uncovers irregular allomorphs that appear to be shaped by historical and etymological influences, offering insights into the evolution of the Bodo language. Through a comprehensive analysis of data, the study highlights the complex interplay between phonology, morphology, and history in the grammatical structure of Bodo. The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of Bodo grammar, providing valuable information for linguists, language educators, and those involved in the preservation of this endangered language.

**Keywords:** Allomorph; Bodo Language; Tibeto-Burman; Phonological Conditioning; Morphological Analysis; Language Preservation; Linguistic Variation.

## 1. Introduction

The Bodo language, belonging to the Tibeto-Burman branch of the Sino-Tibetan language family, holds a prominent place in the linguistic landscape of Northeast India. Despite its rich cultural heritage and significant population of speakers, Bodo is categorized as an endangered language, particularly vulnerable in the context of globalization. Historically rooted in oral tradition, Bodo has gradually evolved into a language of written literature, a transformation that began in the early twentieth century. This evolution has been propelled by the concerted efforts of dedicated Bodo scholars and linguists, who have strived to preserve and develop the language.

In 2003, the recognition of Bodo reached a milestone when it was included in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution through the Bodo Accord, known as the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC). This constitutional recognition not only affirmed the importance of

the Bodo language but also paved the way for its formal use in education and governance. Today, Bodo is used as a medium of instruction up to the 10th grade and is taught as a Modern Indian Language (MIL) at the higher secondary and undergraduate levels. Furthermore, Bodo is offered as a subject for postgraduate and doctoral studies, reflecting its growing academic significance.

This research paper aims to explore a critical aspect of Bodo grammar: the phenomenon of allomorphs. Allomorphs, as variants of a morpheme, play a crucial role in understanding the structural intricacies of any language. In Bodo, allomorphs are conditioned both phonologically and morphologically, leading to a rich and complex system of grammatical markers. This study seeks to analyze the different types of allomorphs present in the Bodo language, with a focus on how these forms are influenced by phonological and morphological factors. By examining the allomorphic variations in Bodo, this paper aims to contribute to the broader understanding of Bodo grammar and its unique linguistic features. The findings of this study will not only shed light on the internal mechanisms of Bodo grammar but also provide insights into the preservation and development of the language in the face of ongoing linguistic and cultural challenges.

#### Objective of the Study:

The primary objective of this study is to investigate the role and functioning of allomorphs within the Bodo language, with a specific focus on their phonological and morphological conditioning. This research aims to achieve the following goals:

- a. To identify and classify allomorphs.
- b. To analyze phonologically conditioned allomorphs.
- c. To investigate morphologically conditioned allomorphs.
- d. To contribute to Bodo linguistic studies.

#### Significance of the Study:

The study of allomorphs in Bodo grammar holds significant value both within the field of linguistics and for the cultural preservation of the Bodo language. The importance of this research can be understood through the following aspects:

- a. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of the Bodo language's grammatical structure, specifically in the area of allomorphic variations.
- b. Bodo, an endangered language, faces the risk of erosion in the face of globalization and the dominance of more widely spoken languages. This study supports efforts to document and preserve Bodo by providing a detailed examination of its grammatical features.
- c. As Bodo is used as a medium of instruction in schools and is studied at higher education levels, this research can serve as a valuable resource for educators and students.
- d. The Bodo language is part of the Tibeto-Burman branch of the Sino-Tibetan language family, a group that includes many languages with diverse grammatical systems. This study's findings can contribute to comparative linguistics by offering data and analysis that may be relevant to understanding allomorphy in related languages.

## **Data and Methodology:**

This section outlines the sources of data used in the study and the methodological approach adopted for analyzing allomorphs in the Bodo language. The combination of both qualitative and quantitative methods ensures a comprehensive examination of allomorphic variations and their grammatical functions in Bodo.

### **Data Collection:**

The data for this study were collected from a variety of sources to ensure a broad and representative sample of Bodo language usage. These sources include:

- **Primary Sources:**
  - o Interviews were conducted with native Bodo speakers across different age groups and regions to capture the natural usage of allomorphs in spoken Bodo. These interviews provided authentic examples of allomorphic variations in everyday language.
  - o Fieldwork was conducted in regions where Bodo is widely spoken, allowing for the observation of language use in natural settings. This helped in understanding the contextual factors that influence allomorph usage.
- **Secondary Sources:**
  - o A selection of Bodo literary works, including novels, poems, and folk tales, was analyzed to identify allomorphic patterns in written language. This also included examining historical texts to trace the evolution of allomorphs over time.
  - o Existing studies on Bodo grammar and related Tibeto-Burman languages were reviewed to provide a theoretical foundation for the analysis. This literature helped contextualize the findings within the broader field of linguistics.

## **Methodology:**

The methodology employed in this study combines descriptive and analytical approaches to provide a thorough examination of allomorphs in Bodo.

- **Descriptive Analysis:**
  - o The first step involved identifying the different allomorphs used in Bodo, particularly in relation to case markers, plural markers, and other grammatical morphemes. These allomorphs were then classified based on their phonological and morphological variations.
  - o The usage of allomorphs was analyzed within various linguistic contexts, including sentence structure, word formation, and phonological environment. This helped in understanding the conditions under which specific allomorphs occur.
- **Phonological Analysis:**
  - o A detailed phonological analysis was conducted to examine how the final phoneme of a word influences the selection of a particular allomorph. This analysis involved the systematic study of phoneme patterns and their impact on allomorph formation.

- o The study focused on identifying the rules that govern phonologically conditioned allomorphs, analyzing how different sounds within a word trigger specific allomorphic changes.

- Morphological Analysis:

- o The research also explored morphologically conditioned allomorphs, which are influenced by the internal structure of the word rather than phonological factors. This analysis included examining irregular word formations and their historical or etymological roots.

## **Review of Literature:**

The study of Bodo grammar began with the efforts of Christian missionaries in the late nineteenth century. The first significant work in this field was published in 1884 by Rev. S. Endle, titled *An Outline Grammar of the Kachari (Bara) Language*. This book marked a foundational moment in the history of Bodo grammar. Later, in 1971, Kamal Kumar Brahma, a prominent figure from the Bodo community, authored *Gwnang Raokhanthi*, a grammar book that provides an important discussion of the Bodo language across various linguistic levels, including phonology, morphology, syntax, and vocabulary. This work represented a traditional approach to Bodo grammar.

Another notable scholar in Bodo linguistics is Pramod Ch. Bhattacharya, who conducted extensive research on the Bodo language and submitted a thesis at Gauhati University in 1977, titled *A Descriptive Analysis of the Boro Language*. Bhattacharya's work offered a more precise and comprehensive analysis of the Bodo language, particularly in the areas of phonology, morphology, and syntax, thereby laying the groundwork for modern linguistic studies of Bodo.

Madhu Ram Baro is also a significant figure in the history of Bodo linguistics. He authored *The Structure of Boro Language*, *Historical Development of Boro Language*, and *Gwdan Raokhanthi*. His works investigate and analyze the Bodo language through the lens of linguistic theory, contributing substantially to the development of Bodo linguistics.

In contemporary times, Phukan Ch. Basumatary and Swarna Prabha Chainary have dedicated themselves to researching the Bodo language and its linguistic aspects, as well as Tibeto-Burman languages. Basumatary's contributions include *An Introduction to Boro Language*, *Boro Raoni Mohorkhanthi*, *Rao Bigiyanni Phora*, and *Raoni Mohor*, which focus on Bodo structure, linguistic theory, and the study of Bodo language groups.

Chainary has also made significant contributions with works such as *Boro Raokhanthi* and *Raoni Mohor*, which analyze the structure of the Bodo language and its relationship with the Tibeto-Burman language family.

Allomorphs, as morphological structures, play a crucial role in Bodo morphology. While the aforementioned scholars have discussed and analyzed various aspects of Bodo morphology, a detailed and focused study on allomorphs in Bodo is necessary to provide a more comprehensive understanding of this linguistic feature.

## Analysis and Findings:

This section presents the analysis of the collected data, focusing on the identification, classification, and examination of allomorphs in the Bodo language. The findings highlight the role of phonological and morphological conditioning in the formation and usage of allomorphs in Bodo grammar.

### Phonologically Conditioned Allomorphs:

The analysis reveals that phonological conditioning plays a significant role in determining the form of allomorphs in Bodo, particularly with nominative case markers and negative markers. The selection of an allomorph is influenced by the final phoneme of the base word to which the suffix is attached. The key findings in this area are as follows:

- **Nominative Case Marker {-a}:** The nominative case marker in Bodo exhibits allomorphic variation based on the phonological environment.
  - o When the final phoneme of the base word is a consonant, the allomorph {-a} remains unchanged, as in *ram* + *a* = *rama* ('Ram is') and *guḍan* + *a* = *guḍana* ('Modern is').
  - o If the final phoneme is /u/, the allomorph is still {-a}, as seen in *luṭitʰu* + *a* = *luṭitʰuṭa* ('Ocean is') and *zetʰu* + *a* = *zetʰuṭa* ('Complex is').
  - o However, when the final phoneme is /ɔ/ or /u/, the allomorph changes to {-wa}, as in *abɔ* + *wa* = *abɔwa* ('Elder sister is') and *dukʰu* + *wa* = *dukʰuwa* ('Sorrow is').
  - o The allomorph {-wa} is also used when the final phoneme is a diphthong such as /iu/, /au/, or /uɔ/, as seen in *ziu* + *wa* = *ziuwa* ('Life is') and *hinzau* + *wa* = *hinzauwa* ('Woman is').
  - o For words ending in /i/, /e/, or /a/, the nominative case marker changes to {-ja}, as in *sini* + *ja* = *sinija* ('Sugar is'), *gaide* + *ja* = *gaideja* ('Gaide is'), and *ada* + *ja* = *adaja* ('Elder brother is').
  - o Similarly, when the final phoneme is a diphthong such as /ɔi/, /ui/, or /ai/, the allomorph becomes {-ja}, as in *goi* + *ja* = *goija* ('Betel-nut is') and *lanzai* + *ja* = *lanzaija* ('Tail is').

These patterns suggest a strong phonological basis for the formation of allomorphs in Bodo, where the final sound of the base word dictates the selection of the appropriate allomorph.

### Morphologically Conditioned Allomorphs:

In addition to phonological factors, morphological conditioning also influences allomorph selection in Bodo. These allomorphs are often tied to specific grammatical categories and are less influenced by phonological context. The main findings include:

- **Plural Markers:** The plural markers in Bodo exhibit allomorphic variation based on the morphological category of the noun or pronoun.
  - o The allomorph {-pʰuɾ} is typically used with nouns and non-honorific pronouns, as in *muṣsu* + *pʰuɾ* = *muṣsuṭpʰuɾ* ('Cows'), *dau* + *pʰuɾ* = *daupʰuɾ* ('Birds'), and *suɾba* + *pʰuɾ* = *suɾbaṭpʰuɾ* ('Someones').

- o Non-honorific second-person and third-person pronouns often take the allomorph {-suɾ}, as in nuɳ + suɾ = nuɳsuɾ ('You all') and bi + suɾ = bisuɾ ('They').
- o Honorific pronouns, on the other hand, use the allomorph {-muɳ}, as in nuɳtʰaɳ + muɳ = nuɳtʰaɳmuɳ ('You all' - honorific) and bitʰaɳ + muɳ = bitʰaɳmuɳ ('They' - honorific).

These findings indicate that morphological conditioning in Bodo is closely linked to the grammatical role of the word, with specific allomorphs reserved for certain categories of nouns and pronouns.

### **Conclusion:**

This study has explored the phenomenon of allomorph in the Bodo language, focusing on the ways in which phonological and morphological factors influence the selection and usage of allomorphs. Through a detailed analysis of data, several key findings have emerged, shedding light on the complex grammatical structure of Bodo.

Firstly, the study has demonstrated that phonological conditioning plays a significant role in the formation of allomorphs in Bodo, particularly in the case of nominative case markers and negative markers. The variation in these markers is systematically linked to the phonological environment, where the final phoneme of the base word dictates the choice of allomorph. This insight not only deepens our understanding of Bodo phonology but also highlights the language's intricate morphophonemic patterns.

Secondly, the research has identified that morphological conditioning is another crucial factor influencing allomorph formation, especially in the context of pluralization. The specific grammatical category of the noun or pronoun determines the allomorph used, reflecting the language's rich morphological system. These findings emphasize the importance of both phonological and morphological contexts in Bodo grammar, illustrating how the language maintains a balance between these two linguistic forces.

This research has contributed significantly to the academic understanding of Bodo grammar, particularly in the area of allomorph. The findings of this study have important implications for linguistic theory, language teaching, and language preservation. By documenting and analyzing the allomorphic variations in Bodo, this study helps to preserve the linguistic heritage of the Bodo-speaking community, ensuring that the language continues to be studied, taught, and spoken by future generations.

The research also opens up avenues for further investigation. Future studies could explore the interaction between allomorph and syntax in Bodo, or compare Bodo allomorphs with those in other, less-studied Tibeto-Burman languages. Additionally, the role of socio-linguistic factors in the use and evolution of allomorphs in Bodo could provide valuable insights into how language functions within its cultural and social context. The study of allomorphs in Bodo not only enhances our understanding of this particular language but also contributes to the broader field of linguistics by offering a detailed examination of how phonology, morphology, and history intersect in the formation of grammatical structures. This research thus stands as a valuable contribution to the study of Tibeto-Burman languages and to the ongoing efforts to

document and preserve the Bodo language.

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