



INDIAN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY GUWAHATI
SHORT ABSTRACT OF THESIS

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SHORT ABSTRACT

This dissertation discusses the phonological characteristics of Deori, a Tibeto-Burman language belonging to the Bodo-Garo group which is listed as a 'definitely endangered' language in UNESCO (2009). Deori is considered as an endangered language because of its less number of speakers (Brown, 1895) and lack of intergenerational language transmission (UNESCO, 2009). It is known that language contact has a significant influence on the linguistic structure and this is true of the Bodo-Garo group with respect to phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics. Assamese, an Indo-Aryan language and the regional language of Assam, a state in Northeast India is in close contact with languages belonging to different language families resulting in asymmetric bilingualism. Bilingualism is widespread in Northeast India and Deori is no exception to this. Native speakers of Deori are competent bilinguals and use Deori and Assamese simultaneously in all social contexts. Thus, it is assumed that close contact with Assamese has had an influence on Deori phonology. The major goal of this work is to discuss the phonological characteristics of Deori which include – the phoneme inventory of Deori, word prosodic structure and prominence pattern of Deori, tone production and tone perception by different generations and phonological processes such as vowel harmony and nasal harmony.

Although there has been some work on Deori before, this is the first time that so many aspects of Deori phonology will be explored in detail and also augmented with acoustic evidence.

The findings show that Deori exhibits iambic stress pattern and no evidence of sesquisyllables were found in the language. Tone is on the verge of extinction in Deori. Acoustic evidence has been presented to show that there is a process of tonoxodus in Deori. Tone reversal is observed in the speech of younger generation speakers. Tone perception test results show that participants associate the low tone word with the high tone word and vice-versa (L>H; H>L) (though not across all words) which conforms to the production test results. The findings also show that Deori has a process of vowel harmony which is close to the vowel harmony pattern of Assamese, languages which are otherwise genealogically distant. Further, the nasal harmony pattern of Deori has been analyzed as per Optimality theory framework. The consonantal changes in Deori, in terms of nasal harmony, highlight some exceptional occurrences attested in the language which shows deviation from the cross-linguistic nasal harmony pattern.