

A Note on the Jarawa Community of Andaman Islands and Their Language.

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Abstract

Andaman Islands have been home to many indigenous communities belonging to Paleolithic population and have remained in isolation for centuries. Jarawa is one of the indigenous populations of the Andaman Islands. They belong to Negrito race but differ in many ways in physical, cultural and linguistic traits from African Negrito populations. Jarawa language is simpler in terms of morphology and exhibits agglutinating in nature with a few affixes. Syntactically, this language is SOV and follows the typological features of SOV languages.

Keywords: Jarawa, Andaman, morphology, indigenous, syntax.

1. Introduction

The Andaman Islands have been the subject of interest to scientists, anthropologists, archaeologists, human evolutionists and linguists for centuries. The Andaman Islands, comprising 550 islands, rocks, and rocky outcrops spanning 6,408 square kilometres, have been the residence of the first Palaeolithic colonizers of Southeast Asia (Thangaraj et al., 2003). These indigenous populations remained in isolation for a longer period than any known ancient population of the world (Kashyap et al., 2004). The archaeological evidence for the early occupation of the Andaman Islands is scant due to the mobile lifestyle of the inhabitants and the limited number of excavations that have taken place. At present, the oldest confirmed radiocarbon date is just >2000 years old, and there are no artefacts to suggest contact or trade with the world outside the archipelago (Cooper, 1993). However, history confirms the insular existence of the Andaman Islands over the past 2 millennia, subject to visits from slave raiders and resource gatherers (Cooper, 1998). Thangaraj et al. (2005) found that the Y-chromosomes of the Jarawa match those of the Onge. Linguistic evidence also says that Onge and Jarawa belong to the same language family (Abbi, 2006, 2009; Blevins, 2007). The present paper attempts to discuss Jarawa community and

¹ The researcher had been the doctoral fellow at the Department of linguistics, Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology, Leipzig / Germany while he was collecting data and working on Jarawa language.

the characteristics their language. The paper is organized as follows: section 1 presents the brief introduction of the Andaman Islands and its population; section 2 focuses on the indigenous populations of the Andaman Islands; section 3 discusses the methodology; section 4 describes the characteristics features of Jarawa language and section 5 presents the conclusion.

2. About Indigenous people of Andaman

The inhabitants of the islands have never been unknown to the world, as the first description of the islands is found in Ptolemy's map of the world, where he spotted a group of tiny islands in the 2nd Century AD, referred to as Buzacata. China and Japan were aware of these islands in the first century AD. However, the first description of the islanders is found in the narrative of the two Arab travellers who traversed the greater part of India and China in the eighth century. Since the description of these two Arab travellers in the 8th century, the islanders were depicted as having a carnival-like appearance, a dog-like face, and long feet. This picture of islanders was also drawn in one of the Sherlock Holmes novels in the 19th century.

In contrast to these descriptions, no community in the Andaman Islands was found to have a carnival-like appearance, a dog-like face, and long feet. Rather, they are innocent, like a child living with nature in the natural environment. They had their own civilization, social structure, and their lifestyle. They are the kings of the jungle and possess enough knowledge to survive in their world. It was observed in recent decades that this community is often depicted as dacoits, deprived, poor, and beggars; on the contrary, it is nothing more than a civilization class between a hunter-gatherer community and a technologically well-developed society. The 2004 tsunami, however, has demonstrated that a technologically less developed community could sustain no loss while a technologically well-developed society had more casualties. Even though they are still depicted as deprived, uncivilized, and the ultimate beggars, on the contrary, they have enough food resources to sustain themselves for years. It is another matter that poachers are depriving the Jarawa community of their natural food resources by poaching into their habitats.

Thirteen linguistically different groups inhabited the Andaman Islands till the British established the penal colony in 1858 at Port Blair (the initial attempt to set up a naval base in 1789 was abandoned due to dire consequences). Of the thirteen, ten groups of the distinct communities were put together to live and named as Great Andamanese (Manoharan, (1989). The Great Andamanese group comprises the

communities from Aka-Bea, Aka-Cari/Sare, Aka-Kede, Aka-Pucikwar, Aka-Jeru, Aka-Bo, Aka-Bale, Aka-Khora, Aka-Juwai, Aka-Kol, and Aka-Bale (Abbi, 2006; Manoharan, 1989). These communities started declining in population since the establishment of the British penal community and its policy to foster friendly relationships and civilize them. At present, they are an admixture of 10 distinct linguistic groups with a population of <40 (Abbi, 2006). The other three groups, Onge, Jarawa and Sentinelese, survive to date. The Jarawas and Sentinelese have saved themselves from the effects of colonization by resisting every effort to colonize them or enter their traditional territory. Onges, however, came into contact with the colonizers in the 19th century; they were left to live their own lives in the tiny islands known as Dugong Creek. Jarawa came in contact with a friendly relationship at the end of 1998, but Sentinelese is still against any contact.

After the friendly relationship was established with the Jarawa at the end of 1998, a group of experts worked on various aspects of the community, including their food habits, availability of food, anthropological studies, and some limited linguistic studies. The researcher took pains to write a descriptive grammar of the language and started his fieldwork in October 2003, which ended in May 2007.

3. Methodology

Since there is no prescribed methodology for working with a monolingual community, the researcher adopted two different methodologies: participant observation and the trial-and-error method. Along with these methods, the researcher has also followed his own method to collect data in the initial phase of data collection. It paved the way for the researcher to learn the language, though the researcher does not claim native-like fluency in the language. The data collected over the span of four years have been the primary source for writing the grammar of the Jarawa language.

4. Jarawa Language

The following is a brief description of the Jarawa language, which includes phonology, morphology, and syntax. Segmental phonology contains the description of the sound system, identification of phonemes and their phonemic status in the language. Morphology includes the criteria to consider a particular sequence of sounds as a morpheme or a word, the description of different word classes and their usage in the language, and the attachment of affixes to morphemes. Syntax comprises the syntactic structure

of the language. Moreover, the researcher has collected several lexical items used in the daily life of the community.

4.1 Phonology

Based on the first-hand elicited data, it can be claimed that the sound inventory of this language contains 41 sounds, out of which 28 are consonants, and 13 are vowels. In the vowels, qualitative and quantitative differences have been attested. In qualitative differences, three-way distinctions in height, the three-way distinction of tongue position and two-way distinction in lip position were found. One high-mid central unrounded vowel was also attested, but its phonemic status in the language is not clear. In quantitative contrast, length was found to be phonemic except for the high-mid central unrounded vowel. In entirety we have /i/, /e/, /u/, /o/, /a/, /ə/ and /ɨ/. In the consonant category, plosives and nasals were found in five places of articulation, namely, bilabial, dental, retroflex, palatal and velar. The aspirated counterparts of the voiceless plosives were also attested, except the bilabial one. Except for these stops, trill, flap and lateral sounds were also found. Two approximants, bilabial and palatal, were also attested. Bilabial and pharyngeal fricatives were also found, but we could not establish these two sounds as phonemes. Two labialized sounds, voiceless, aspirated velar plosives and voiceless pharyngeal fricative, were also attested; however, their phonemic status is still doubtful.

The distribution of the sounds at the syllabic and word level suggests that most of the consonants occur syllable-initially and –finally except the sounds /t^h, c, c^h, y, ɲ, r, h^w/, which are not found syllable finally. The distribution of vowels is tested at the word level because at the level of syllable, vowels form the nucleus of a syllable, whether it is initially or finally. At the word level, short vowels were found to occur at the initial, medial and final positions, while long vowels were attested initially and medially.

CVCV is the most common syllabic structure, though the minimal possible syllabic structure has a nucleus with an optional onset and optional coda. We thus have V, CV, VC, and CVC. Moreover, the language allows only one consonant at the onset position and one consonant at the coda position. However, words are found to be monosyllabic, disyllabic and polysyllabic.

The unique phonological process in this language operates with compounds that feature a possessive prefix and a bisyllabic noun root. In such constructions, the independent root gets truncated, and the reduced form is attached to a possessive prefix. The possessive prefix follows the vowel harmony if the possessive prefix and the noun root are considered as a bound form.

4.2 Morphology

Morphologically, this language is agglutinating in nature and employs simple morphology through affixation. There are a few prefixes and suffixes. In the prefix category, there are pronominals and referentiality/definiteness markers, whereas in the suffix category, mood or evidentiality marking with a verb, plural marking with a noun, and state/evidentiality marking with an adjective are attested. Pronominal as a prefix to a verb has two interpretations: either this pronominal could be the subject or object of the clause, or this prefix could be employed as a co-referencing marker for the nominal object of the clause. The co-referencing marker indicates the non-specific and non-visual object of the clause. A denominalization suffix and a negative suffix are also attested.

Nominal roots, in this language, can be free or bound. The bound roots are those roots which take possessive prefix obligatorily. These roots are related to human body parts and kinship terms. Other than these roots, all the roots are free roots. Human-specific verbs and adjectives are also found as bound roots. First-person, second person and third-person pronominals with having no plural counterparts are attested. These pronominals function as possessive prefixes, subject and object of the clause and a co-referencing marker in case of third person. Possession in this language is expressed by putting the possessive prefix before the possessed noun.

Verbal Morphology demonstrates that Agreement and Tense and Aspect are not marked morphologically. Rather, Mood and Evidentiality are marked on the verb. In evidentiality, verified and non-verified evidentiality are distinguished. Verified evidentiality means that the action or event can be verified by the addressee. Apart from evidentiality, hypothetical mood and assertive mood are differentiated. Thus, verbs may take evidentiality marker or, hypothetical mood marker or assertive mood marker as suffix. The negative suffix is also marked on the verb, but the verb selects only one suffix, either an evidentiality/mood marker or a negative suffix. In the case of negation of the clauses where evidentiality/mood marker is attached to a verb, the negation is formed syntactically. Two kinds of causative constructions, morphological and syntactic, are confirmed. However, morphological causatives are employed for a handful of verbs, while syntactic causatives are used in abundance. In syntactic causatives, the independent word is used to express causation, and lexical verbs indicate the meaning of the predicates.

In the adjective category, this language has descriptive adjectives, numerals and demonstratives. This language also employs a degree of comparison, where the positive degree, comparative degree and

superlative degree are attested. The positive adjective has simple clauses; in comparative degree, standard of comparison precedes the marker of comparison, and the adjective follows the marker of comparison. A superlative degree is formed by using an intensifier or replaced by a completely new word which does not demonstrate any resemblance to the adjective in a positive degree. No derivational process is found to derive adverbs from adjectives, as happens in English.

Four types of word-formation processes are confirmed. These word formation processes include compounding, denominalization, reduplication and the use of empty morpheme. In compounding, the combination of Noun-Noun, Noun-Adjective and Noun-Noun-Adjective are found. In the denominalization process, a noun is denominalized to form a verb with the help of a suffix. These denominalized verbs form a separate verb class. In reduplication, both syllabic reduplication and word reduplication are also attested. Moreover, this language employs a morpheme with personal nouns, as well as other nouns as a suffix. The meaning of this suffix is not clear. This morpheme appears to be an empty morpheme.

4.3 Syntax

In syntax, simple clause structure, interrogative constructions, imperative sentences, negative constructions and cleft constructions are found. Simple clauses can be of two types: verbless clause and verbal clause. Verbless clauses have nominal or adjectival predicate and Verbal clauses have verbal predicates. In verbless clauses, we have nouns/pronouns as Subject followed by nominal or adjectival predicate. If Subject of a verbless clause is a personal pronoun, the subject is just juxtaposed. But subject of a verbless clause is noun, it takes a copula *t^{hi}* in between subject and nominal or adjectival predicate. Verbal clauses are formed by having subject and verbal predicate. In transitive construction, the order of subject, verb and object is SUBJECT OBJECT VERB.

In interrogative clauses, we have content construction and yes/no question. In content construction, we have content word in its situ position with optional question particle. In yes/no question, we have question particle in the beginning of the clause.

In imperative construction, we have verb and optional object depending on the nature of verb. There is no word or morpheme for politeness, or request.

No syntactic case marking is found, though two forms are attested, which express semantic case. The morpheme {də} has multifunctional usages in syntactic structure: it is used to express the place of location, source of location, and goal of location. Another morpheme {nac^he} expresses comitativeness.

5. Conclusion

Jarawa, a monolingual hunter-gather indigenous community of Andaman Islands known for its nudity and hostility for centuries, came into contact with outside world in 1998. It paved the way to understand each other (Jarawa and non-Jarawa population). It gave an opportunity to author to work on the language of this community. The paper presents a brief introduction to the language of Jarawa from sound structure to syntactic structure.

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