



An Exploration of Onomatopoeia Words in Bodo Folk Songs: A Linguistic Analysis

Amula Boro

Research Scholar

Centre for Studies in Languages, Dibrugarh University

Dr. Pratima Brahma

Assistant Professor,

Centre for Studies in languages, Dibrugarh University

Abstract: Onomatopoeia is an important part of morphological reduplication particularly under lexical reduplication. The term 'onomatopoeia' has more than a few or several variant forms including onomatopoeic, onomatopoeic and onomatopoeias. Onomatopoeia plays an important role in the development and formation of a language as it reflects the natural association between sound and meaning as well particular things, action or phenomena. Such as word mostly has been used being in so many Bodo folk songs which helps to make melodies and rhyming couples. Besides, onomatopoeia words being used native speakers in their daily social life. Initially, maximum numbers of onomatopoeia words structurally can be found in reduplicative and partial reduplicative forms. In this study, the researcher trying to find out some onomatopoeia words used by in Bodo folk songs.

Keywords: Onomatopoeia, Definition of Onomatopoeia, Function of onomatopoeia, Folk song,

1.0 Introduction:

Linguistically, the Boro language belongs to the Bodo sub-group of the Bodo-Naga branch under the Assam-Burmese group of the Tibeto-Burman division of the Sino-Tibetan language family. Over time, the language has developed several distinctive linguistic features. Due to historical connection and influence from various neighbouring languages, Boro has incorporated a number of new linguistic characteristics. As a result, the language exhibits unique features in its phonology, morphology, lexicon, and syntax when compared to other languages of the Tibeto-Burman language branch. The Boro language is particularly very rich in its phonological and morphological structures, which give it a distinct linguistic identity.

The term onomatopoeia refers to the use of words that imitate or reproduce the natural sounds associated with particular things, actions or phenomena. It may also describe words whose sound quality evokes or suggests their meaning. The term has several variant forms such as onomatopoeic, onomatopoeic and onomatopoeias etc. Onomatopoeia takes an important role in the development and formation of languages as well as development of child language including the Bodo language. In Bodo, a large number of onomatopoeic words are used, most commonly appearing as nouns and adjectives. However, in actual

sentences these onomatopoeic forms frequently function adverbially. In terms of structure, onomatopoeias words in Bodo may occur in the form of simple, complete, or partial reduplication.

Definition of Onomatopoeia:

a. According to Alibha- *“The term onomatopoeia means formation and use of words to imitate sounds. For example- dong, crackle, moos, etc. It is a figure of speech in which sound reflects the sense”*¹

b. T. Murugarathanam defines- *“The sound of onomatopoeia is only, that indicating the thing of the sound. That means the sound of the thing is the word. Like this the words which have some similarity with sounds is the reason for calling them onomatopoeia”*²

However, Onomatopoeia refers to lexical items whose phonetic form directly imitates or suggests the sound associated with a particular action or object. These words are sound symbolic and show an important role in expressive and descriptive language.

1.1 Objectives of the study:

- (i) To highlight the Bodo folk songs as an important component of Bodo oral tradition.
- (ii) To identify and describe the use of onomatopoeic words in Bodo folk songs.
- (iii) To explore how onomatopoeia words expression’s function and represented in Bodo folk songs.

1.2 Area of the Study:

In this study, the area of the study involves the specific linguistic patterns of onomatopoeic words in Bodo folk songs, with particular emphasis on their morphological features and the social contexts in which they occur. The research is set within this linguistic and cultural framework.

1.3 Methodology:

Methodology is an important part of every research. In this study the researcher has been applied descriptive and analytical method. As the data collection here adopted two sources primary and secondary.

Primary sources: For the primary data has been collected through the field visit in different areas of the native Boro language speakers as well as possible. Along with, the researcher, as the primary data collected from various profession, gender, age group, and any social activities by interview method with Bodo folk song performers as well as through audio recordings of folk songs.

Secondary sources: The secondary data were collected through a reading by carefully from the different sources, like some Assamese and English theoretical textbooks, Bodo textbooks, e-books, e-journals, magazines, various journals, library studies, articles of different languages, cinema, and other online social media activities relating to the folk song of the Bodo.

2.0 Discussion:

The presence of rich onomatopoeic material in Bodo folk songs emphasizes the importance of integrating sound symbolic analysis into broader linguistic and folkloristic research. Onomatopoeia helps bridge phonology, morphology, semantics, and pragmatics: it is simultaneously a phonetic imitation, a morphological construction often reduplicated and a pragmatic device used in performance. A systematic corpus-based study can reveal patterns such as frequency distributions across genres, regional variation, and diachronic change how onomatopoeic forms evolve over time. Ethnographic attention to performance contexts will also clarify how singers and audiences co-construct meaning through sound.

¹ A. Parimalagantham, *A Study of Structural Reduplication in Tamil and Telegu*, Unpublished Thesis, 2008, p-286

² Daithun Baro, *Process of Reduplication in Bodo*, Unpublished Thesis, 2018, p-188

The Bodos found a culturally rich community with an equally rich and diverse body of folklore. Among the various genres of folklore, folk songs occupy a prominent place, adorning social and cultural life with dignity and magnificence. Folk songs keep a close connection with human experience, serving as expressive mediums through which people articulate their emotions, joys and sorrows, thoughts, and feelings in various life situations. They are often sung to inspire, advise, motivate, or even suggest reflection and remorse among members of the community.

Bodo folk songs encompass a wide range of categories including Songs of the Soil, Songs related to Ballad, Songs related to Heros, Songs related to Lullaby and Nursery rhymes, Songs related to Marriage, Songs related to Love, Songs related to Jocke or Humorous, Songs related to Bwisagu, Songs related to Religion and Songs of Humour. Across these different types, many onomatopoeic expressions give the impression, performing a variety of linguistic functions. Depending on the context, onomatopoeia in these songs may function as nouns, adjectives, or adverbs. In some cases, entire songs or individual lines are deeply composed of onomatopoeic forms. In the following section, selected examples will be cited from Folk Songs of the Bodos, collected and edited by Mohini Mohan Brahma, to illustrate the presence and usage of these onomatopoeic elements.

2.1 Simple or non-reduplicated Onomatopoeia words:

Simple or non-reduplicated onomatopoeic words are single lexical items that directly imitate or represent natural sounds, like buzz, splash, hiss etc. So, like different languages in Bodo folk songs can be found non-reduplicated onomatopoeic word. Here, some examples of songs containing simple or non-reduplicated onomatopoeic words are presented below.

Sila Sila

Nwngni megon mwjangkhon labw

Amwkhani megon gajrikhou lang uh **phu**

Honwi silaya birlangbai.³

English rendering:

Oh kite, oh kite, hearken I say

Take you the affected eye

Of this child.

And give him your good eye

I blow at his eye

I blow off all diseases

With my breath.

Look these, over these

The kite has flown away.

In the Lullaby song presented above, the final word '**phu**' in the third line indicates the sound of blowing or blast otherwise the sound of hissing or puffing produced from the mouth. Within this context,

³ Anil Boro, Folk Literature of the Bodos, 2010, P-102

in this song the term '*phu*' is functioning as a simple or non-reduplicated onomatopoeia word. Which contributing to the sound symbolic and expressive quality of the folk song.

Such as in other songs can find same ways form.

Thingtha thingtha jotha thorkha

Gwrbwao sonaphwr

Mwjangwi homtha.⁴

English rendering:

(Thingtha thingtha sound of cymbal and thorkha

In soul and spirit dear beloveds'

Hold on welly.)

In the Bwisagu song cited above, in the first line the word '*thingtha*' represents the ringing sound produced by the traditional Bodo folk instrument of cymbal. In this context, '*thingtha*' functions as a simple onomatopoeic form.

In another folk song can found simple onomatopoeia word. Such as-

Bwisagu bwthwrni okha hanaizwng

Bomphang bilayabw **khrob** khrob akhai khobw,

Jwngni gswabw bagurum bagurum mwsanw gsw jayw.⁵

English rendering:

(With the showers of Bwisagu,

The tree leaves clap in delight,

We too wish to dance joyfully.)

In the Bwisagu song mentioned above, here, the word '*khrob*' in the second line denotes the sound produced by clapping two hands together. In this context, '*khrob*' functions as a free and simple onomatopoeic form.

2.2 Complete Reduplicated Onomatopoeia word:

Complete reduplicated onomatopoeia refers to a sound imitative lexical item formed by repeating the entire base word, where the repetition increases the meaning of the original sound. This type of reduplication frequently expresses continuity, repetition, frequency, or heightened sound quality. In Bodo folk song a few complete reduplicated onomatopoeic words can found. These are discussed below-

Azlong bizlong Zwngni nowa goblong,

Dahaswi okha dahaswi

Sandung honwi phwinwswi.

Wi sandung Wi sandung

Okha hadwng **dram dram**

⁴ Bhaben Narrzi, Boro Kacharini Khuga Methai, 2019, p-15

⁵ Informant, Monjid Daimary, 50 years, Male.

Okha thangbla jagwn srang

Thabaynw mwngwn grang grang.⁶

English rendering:

(Our hut is wretched,
Oh rains, do not come down
Yonder the sun rises, look.
Welcome to you oh sun,
Come on.
Drive away the rain drops
That have begun to fall.
Spread you your heat
That the moisture
May get dried up,
To let us have dry roads.)

Cited above song is arranged with a rhyme scheme. In the stanza, the term '*azlong*' means "to stand on the toes," while '*bizlong*' is a partial reduplicated form derived from '*azlong*'. The expression '*azlong bizlong*' functions as an onomatopoeic element assigning the sense of "not being able to reach properly," and therefore may be classified as a partial reduplicated onomatopoeia.

On the other hand, the expressions '*dram dram*' in *Okha hadung dram dram* is indicating the sound of heavy rainfall and '*grang grang*' in '*Thabaynu mwngun grang grang*' is indicating a dried or shrivelled condition are examples of complete reduplicated onomatopoeias. In these lines, both '*dram dram*' and '*grang grang*' function as adjectives within the song.

Hence, in another example of song-

Daobo daobo ganga robo robo
Harsa gotho nubla dwiyao zobo zobo.⁷

English rendering:

(Oh crane, oh crane,
Your wings are tender and soft.
You take a dip in water and vanish in fear of Harsa boy.)

Above cited the song, or rather the entire line, is filled with onomatopoeic expressions. In the song, '*daobo daobo*' functions as a noun onomatopoeia. Similarly, '*robo robo*' in '*ganga robo robo*' functions as an adjective, as it describes the tender and soft wings of the crane. In the line '*harsa gotho nubla dwiyao zobo zobo*' the last word '*zobo*' fully repeated or reduplicated in two times. In this song, the fully reduplicated onomatopoeia '*zobo zobo*' functions as an adverb.

⁶ M.M. Brahma, Folk-songs of the Bodos: 1960, p. 4

⁷ M.M. Brahma, Folk-songs of the Bodos: 1960, p. 9

Bar **siu siu** bardwng

Pherenga lanzai mwsadwng

Oua bizou dembaidwng

Ayo zaoisw sengra

Hagadwi bohora.⁸

English rendering:

(The breeze blows gently;

The bird Fehu wags its tail;

The bamboo top is bowed down.

Oh, our young son-in-law is full of phlegm.)

In the song cited above, '**siu siu**' is complete reduplicated onomatopoeic expression word which functioning both as an adjective and as an adverb within the lines. The term '**siu siu**' represents the sound of a heavily or harshly blowing wind. As noted earlier, the entire sentence of the song may be interpreted as onomatopoeic depending on its rhyming pattern and contextual usage.

2.3 Partial Reduplicated Onomatopoeia Word:

A partial reduplicated onomatopoeia word is an onomatopoeic form in which only part of the base word is repeated, instead of repeating the whole word. The reduplication may involve repeating an initial syllable, a final syllable, or a phonologically modified segment of the original word. This type of reduplication creates a sound symbolic effect that increases or modifies the meaning of the original sound. However, here the partial reduplicated onomatopoeia word how to take the role in folk song discussed below with relevant example of selected songs.

An example of such lullaby song can be observed in the following verses:

Gogrege go

Amaini no.

Angni khorokhou zai zayw

Bi raza zagwn.⁹

English Rendering:

(The cock shouts gogrege go

My uncle's house.

Who eats my head

Will become a king.)

In the above example, Basically, the first line of the song **gogrege go** is imitate the sound produced by rooster a domestic cock of home. Here, the term **gogrege go** is refer to as a partial onomatopoeia word in Bodo. In this song this word functioning as an adjective. The whole word of **gogrege go** is did not repeated completely. Otherwise, instead of **gogrege** only repeated **go** the partial reduplicated part of **gogrege**. The term **gogrege** does not represent free meaning alone.

⁸ M.M. Brahma, Folk-songs of the Bodos: 1960, p. 9

⁹ M.M. Brahma, Folk Song of the Bodo, 1960, P-7

In addition, another example of Bodo folk songs can be found some partial reduplicated onomatopoeia word. For example-

Sal sirini gaihenjwng
Dumbru khaosani uwaljwng, Bihari sanwijwng

Dum dum dam dam soulaibai

Honwi alonga
Ha ladwngmwn agini khona
Mwsou baidwngwn gong mena
Dao jalangbai phari phari
Oma jalangbai phari phari
Mwider jalangbai rumbang rumbang
Dana jabaodwlwi alonga.¹⁰

English rendering,



(Listen the sound of made by a flail

A flail of Sal wood

And look, the guileless woman is quarrelling

And making noise

With her co-sister while husking paddy.

Yours husband had purchased land

In an inauspicious direction.

And his bullocks had unlucky horns.

Birds have eaten up the corn

And hogs have joined in eating the same,

What shall you eat now,

Oh, guileless girls?)

In the cited above song is related to cultivator or agriculture. In this song, if we look at through the semantic point of view, in the third lines of the song the word ***dum dum dam dam*** is a sound represent something objects or fell in down something natural objects refers a thing which we can be touch or seen. In fact, mentioned above song the word ***dum dum dam dam*** is the sound produced of made by a flail of Sal wood.

In this song, ***dum dum*** is functioning as complete reduplicated onomatopoeia word and on the other hand, ***dam dam*** is functioning as partial onomatopoeia word instead of the earlier word ***dum dum***.

¹⁰ M.M. Brahma, Folk song of the Bodos, 1960, p-35

3.0 Conclusion:

Onomatopoeic words in Boro folk songs are not merely sound imitations they are integral components of the artistic, cultural and linguistic material of the Boro community. Their linguistic analysis reveals patterns of reduplication, semantic motivation and stylistic enhancement. As cultural things, these sound-symbolic forms contribute to the vividness and performative richness of folk songs. Therefore, the study of onomatopoeia in Boro folk songs offers valuable insights into the intersection of language, culture, and oral literature.

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