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A DESCRIPTIVE GRAMMAR OF TAI AHOM

A Thesis Submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Award of the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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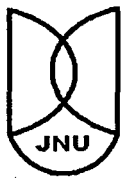
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DECLARATION BY THE CANDIDATE

This thesis titled "**A Descriptive Grammar of Tai Ahom**" submitted by me for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, is an original work and has not been submitted so far in part or in full, for any other degree or diploma of any University or Institute.

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List of abbreviations

1s - 1st person single

1p - 1st person plural

2s - 2nd person single

2p - 2nd person plural

3s - 3rd person single

3p - 3rd person plural

ABL - ablative case

asp. - aspirated

CAUS - causative marker

CL - classifier

CON - continuity aspect

CONF - confirmation marker

COMP - comparison

CP - conjunctive participle

DAT - dative case

DEM - demonstrative pronoun

ERG - ergative marker

EXCL - exclamation marker

FG - feminine gender

FUT - future tense

HAB - habitual aspect

HON - marker of honorificity

IMP - marker of imperative mood

INF - infinitive marker

INS - instrumental case

LOC - locative case

MG - masculine gender

NEG - marker of negation

NF - non-finite marker
OBJ - objective case
PERF - perfective aspect
PL - plural number
PST - past tense
REF - reflexive pronoun
REQ - request marker
SUP - superlative degree
vd. - voiced
vl. - voiceless
VOC - vocative case
unasp. - unaspirated

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Chapter1
Introduction

1.1 The language:

The Tai Ahom language belongs to the Tai family of languages, which are largely spoken in South-east Asia. The Tai family of languages is considered to be one of the most important cultural mediums in this region. Its numerous speakers are spread in a considerably vast area - extending from Assam to Kwangsi and Kwangtung, to the island of Hainan, from Laos and Thailand to the border of Tibet, including the Yun-nan province of China.

As G. A. Grierson (1903) points out, all Tai languages belong to the Siamese-Chinese family of the Indo-Chinese languages. Researchers tend to differ in context of the distribution of Tai languages under various divisions and sub-divisions. The Tai language family has been variously assigned to the northern, southern and to even an independent group. Grierson recognizes two distinct but closely connected groups of Tai languages - Northern and Southern. The Northern includes -

“...Khamti, Chinese Shan and Shan, together with the ancient Ahom language now extinct; and the latter includes Lao and Siamese”¹

Fang Kuei Li² mentions three main subgroups of Tai languages -

- **Southwestern group** - Siamese, Lao, Shan, Ahom, Black Tai, White Tai etc.
- **Central group** - Tho, Tay, Nung, Lungchow, Tienpao etc.
- **Northern group** - Wuming, Po-ai, Dioi, Pu-i, Saek.

P. A. Lanyon-Orgill³ divides Tai languages into six subgroups -

- **Northern** (containing Khamti, Turung, Phake - languages spoken in Assam and

¹ Grierson, p. 59

² Li, 1977

³ Phukan, 1966

northeast Myanmar, and the languages of the Shan states)

- **Central** (including Tho with its several varieties spoken in Tongking and parts of Yun-nan; Nung, Nhang, Chung-kia, and Dioi spoken in South China and Tongking)
- **Southern** (containing Thai of central and southern Thailand, White Tai and Black Tai, Lao, Lu and Khun spoken in the eastern Shan states)
- **Ahom** (including Aiton)
- **Klai** (including Li or Le, Lokia, Loi or Dai spoken in the island of Hainan)
- **Liao** (or Kehlao, spoken in the region between Yun-nan and Kwei-chow. It is almost extinct now)

R. A. D. Forrest⁴ grouped them into two divisions -

- **Northern** (containing Khamti, Shan, Chung-kia and Klai)
- **Southern** (including Ahom, Siamese, Lao etc.)

The Ethnologue data⁵ considers the Tai Ahom language as an extinct language of Assam, India. It classifies the Tai language family as Tai-Kadai, Kam-Tai, Be-Tai, Tai-Sek, Tai, Southwestern, East Central and Northwestern. It also comments on the usage of the language -

“No longer spoken in daily life, but used in religious chants and literary materials. Former language of the Tai-Ahom king. Possibly 8,000,000 Assamese speakers claim to be of Ahom descent (A. Diller 1990). Extinct.”

Stephen Morey⁶ remarks,

“Currently four languages of the South-western branch of the Tai-Kadai family are actively spoken in Assam, Northeast India. These are Aiton, Khamti, Khamyang and Phake. There are in addition several other

⁴ Ibid

⁵ *Ethnologue*, 14th edition.

⁶ Morey, 2004

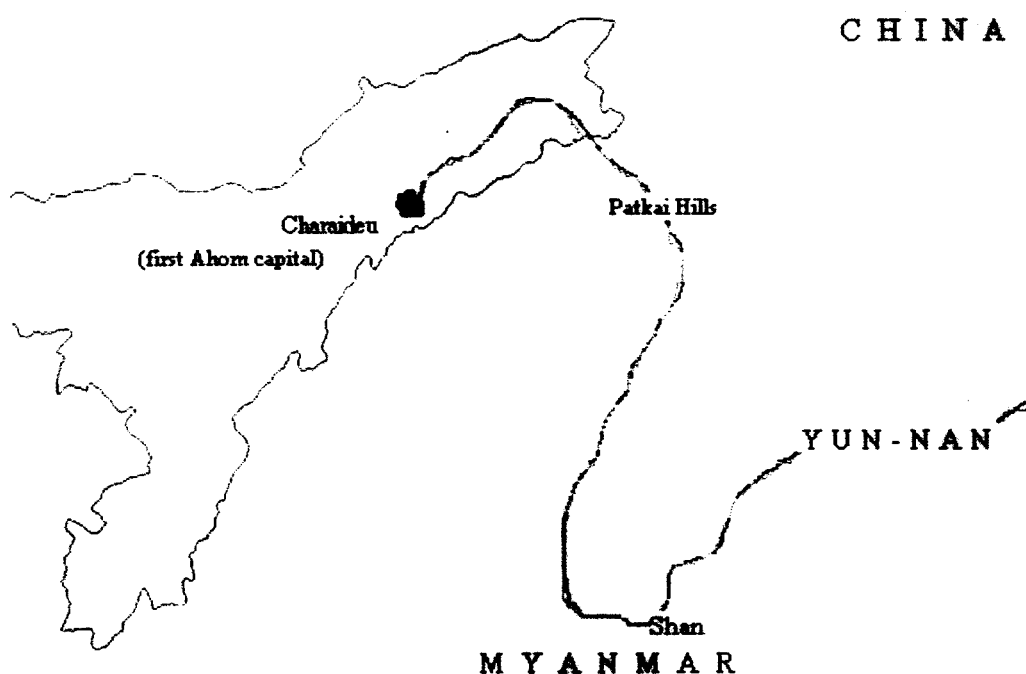
communities who identify themselves as Tai, such as the Ahom and Turung, but who no longer speak the Tai language.”

1.2 Cultural and historical background:

The word ‘Tai’ is a common name denoting a great branch of the Mongoloid population of Asia. The Tai people are now mainly concentrated in the Indo-Chinese peninsula. As mentioned in the beginning, the present habitat of the Tai people extends from Assam in the west to Kwangsi and Hainan in the east, and from the interior of Yun-nan in the north to the southernmost extremity of Thailand (Siam) in the south. The groups and subgroups are already stated above.

Even though the fertile valley of China is the original habitat of the Tai people, the Chinese culture has the least influence on the Tai language and culture. When the kings of different clans and dynasties started establishing their own kingdoms in China, migration of the Tai people in search of new regions began. By 5th-6th century AD, they settled in Yun-nan (of Southern China) along with their own language, culture and system of administration. By the time, the Tai people were divided into several other groups and subgroups, and scattered in Southeast Asia.

One of those groups, under the leadership of Su-ka-pha, crossed the Patkai hills in Eastern India, entered Assam and after successfully overpowering the local aborigines, established a kingdom in the Brahmaputra valley. This group was later known as the Tai Ahom people, as being called by the locals. They ruled Assam for about six hundred years (1228AD-1826AD). Indeed, the name ‘Assam’ was called after the Ahoms. The migration of the Ahoms is shown in the map followed.



Map 1.1: *The migration of the Ahoms* (Source: www.mapsofindia.com)

Other smaller groups of the Tai people that came to Assam during a later period are known as - Khamti, Phake, Turung, Aiton, Khamyang, Sham and Nora. All these groups came from the Shan states of Myanmar. Unlike the Hinduized Ahoms, these later immigrants still preserve their traditional habits and customs. Today, they are mostly scattered in different areas of Eastern Assam. They are almost all Buddhists.

Among the most significant contributions the Ahoms made, two are strikingly remarkable - the tradition of writing history and the system of administration. The Ahoms sincerely maintained chronicles describing the reigns of different Ahom kings (or /*swərgədeu* /) in terms of various historical manuscripts (or /*burəŋji* /) and different other literary works. Two types of historical manuscripts are generally found - (a) the genealogy of royal families and the royal affairs were documented in royal historical scripts (/ *raʃ burəŋji* /), and (b) the chronological account of Ahom families was recorded in specific manuscripts called /*bəŋxawəli* /, which are being written till present. Besides these records, there can be found other important books and documents on topics as varied as philosophy, technology, medicinal remedies etc. In order to get access of these significant books and records, proper knowledge and a

graspable understanding of the language is certainly inevitable.

The Ahoms brought along the Tai language to Assam with them and used it as the spoken language here. The language has its own writing system, which is said to be originated from Brahmi script. The language is rich in the historical account of ancient Assam, which forms the grandeur of Assamese literature. It also contributes significantly to the vocabulary of the Assamese language. Grierson mentions about the writing systems of different Tai languages,

*“They have seven different forms of written character – the Ahom, the Cis-Salwin Shan, the Khamti, the Tai Man (all from Chinese Shan), the Lu and Khun (trans-Salwin Shans), the Lao, and the Siamese.”*⁷

It is strongly assumed that the Tai Ahom contains, among the Northern Tai languages, many written forms that have been lost in the modern languages of the group. Same with Siamese, in case, where the Southern Tai group is concerned.⁸

The Ahoms are the most populous among all Tai groups of Assam. But their linguistic practice has declined to the extent of its extinction, although other Tai languages in Assam are still in use. Tai Ahom is no longer the mother tongue of the Ahoms who speak the Assamese language now. But in its traditional form it is still used by the Ahom priestly class in their ancient religious ceremonies and in divination. The primary cause for its extinction is the strong influence of the Assamese language. The medium of communication and of literary works was Ahom since the reign of Su-ka-pha. From the time of the fourth Ahom king, the language started fading away slowly. By the time of the fifth Ahom king, Assamese language came into being - functioning both as an official language and a layman's common spoken form. By the advent of Shankardev⁹ (16th century AD) and his Vaisnavite movement, Assamese came in the forefront while Tai Ahom took a backseat forever. Grierson comments very precisely on it -

⁷ Grierson, 59

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ The forerunner of the Bhakti movement in Assam.

“The change of the speech of the Ahoms into Assamese can be very clearly traced. Their earlier Ahom Copperplate inscriptions were in the Ahom language and character. Next they appear in a bright form, and finally in Assamese or Sanskrit. When the kings began to take Hindu officials the court language at first continued to be Ahom, but it was gradually supplanted by Assamese, and now Ahom is known by only a few priests.”¹⁰

The Ahoms ruled Assam, but they never tried to impose their language on the local people. Instead, they themselves accepted the Assamese language and tried their best for the improvement of it. The Ahom language continued among the Ahoms till 15th century AD. However, the language continued to prevail even after the sunset of the Ahom supremacy concerning history writing and other religious affairs.

Gradually, the Ahoms became bilinguals with the constant influence of the local languages, mainly the Assamese language. There are several reasons that can be attributed to the bilingual status of the Ahoms. The Ahoms knew it very well that by depending on the few limited people brought along with them, they could not think of a big empire. Hence, the Ahom administrators accomplished with perfect administrative diplomacy gave the local people their stately esteem and grade by employing them in different regal affairs. The influence was far-sighted; the Ahom king won the hearts of the local people by showing high esteem to the local language with its practice in royal interactions. The Assamese language started spreading its influence gradually. 17th century AD onwards, the Ahoms started writing their history in Assamese as well as in their own Ahom language. And for that reason, the Ahoms without doubt began to study Assamese deeply in order to accumulate knowledge of the language. And because of such reasons, finally the Assamese language rooted firmly in place of the Ahom language.

There are two more reasons for the disappearance of the Ahom language. According to historical accounts, the founding Ahom king Su-ka-pha brought along a very few Tai women with him. That is why several Ahoms wedded many local girls.

¹⁰ Grierson, 62-3

Their children hardly knew the language or not at all. Naturally, the influence of the Ahom language began declining among the next generation. Secondly, the complexity of the Ahom language is significant. It is tonal and monosyllabic in nature. Besides, the phonetic system of the language is difficult. Hence, the Ahoms became interested in a comparatively simple and toneless Assamese language. And with time, the Ahom language is now on the verge of extinction.

It is natural that the Assamese vocabulary is also full of many Ahom words that are used in the exchange of simple conversation. Some of those words are incorporated directly into Assamese and others either being some broken words or being compounded. For example, the names of places in Assam are mostly Ahom words - Namti, Nazira, Charaideu etc. Some important words are - */burɔŋji/* 'history', */rɔŋ/* 'colour', */zan/* 'stream', */rap/* 'interest', */liŋ-ləŋ/* 'criss-cross' etc. Surnames of the Ahoms and their kinship terms are still Ahom words.

1.3 Geographical and demographic distribution:

After the British occupation in Assam (1828AD), the Ahoms found themselves gradually reduced to the status of a distinct community only among the population of the Brahmaputra valley, their territory being virtually confined to the districts of Sivasagar and Lakhimpur in Eastern (or Upper) Assam. But currently, they are spread all over the Upper Assam and most of the other parts of Assam. The geographical distribution of the Ahom people is illustrated in the following map.



Map 1.2: *Geographical distribution of the Ahom people* (Source: www.mapsofindia.com)

Some statistical figures regarding the demographical distribution of the Ahom people are stated below.

Total Ahom people	About 25-30 lakhs
Major districts in Assam where they are spread	Sivasagar, Lakhimpur, Golaghat, Dhemaji, Jorhat, Dibrugarh, Tinsukia. All of them are bilinguals.
Total Ahom speakers who still speak the language	About 150 (mainly Ahom priests). The age group of these speakers varies from 40 to 80 and above. There are about 300-350 students who are learning the language through various diploma courses.
Major districts where these speakers reside	Sivasagar, Golaghat, Dhemaji, Jorhat.

Figure 1.1: *Demographical distribution of the Ahom people.*

1.4 Overview of grammatical studies on the language:

1.4.1 Ethnographic records/studies

Earlier linguistic works in Tai Ahom include the studies of Rev. Nathan Brown, B. H. Hodgson, Sir George Campbell, E. T. Dalton, G. H. Damant and P. R. T. Gurdon (all were Christian missionaries in Assam during the period of late 19th century AD) who wrote on different occasions about the phonetics and vocabulary of the Tai Ahom language. G. A. Grierson (1903) has included a brief and comprehensive study of this language along with its grammatical sketch and vocabulary in his *Linguistic Survey of India*. Then there are recent grammar texts like *Elementary Tai Primer with Grammar* by Aimyakhang Gohain (1992) and *Lik Peng Khom Tai Ahom* by Bimal Borpatragohain (2003). Recently, Stephen Morey (2005) has published his research work entitled *The Tai Languages in Assam - A Grammar and Texts*. Morey's work is,

*"A comprehensive linguistic analysis of two endangered Tai languages of Assam - Aiton and Phake, together with information about Tai Khamyang, a highly endangered variety. This book presents chapters on phonology, syntax, lexicography and the writing system as well as discussing earlier recorded data on the Tai languages in detail."*¹¹

1.4.2 Lexical records

The most significant work on this language is the *Ahom Lexicons* edited by B. Barua and N. Deodhai Phukan (re-edited in 1991), a Tai-Assamese-English dictionary based on original Tai manuscripts. However, the first Ahom-Assamese-English dictionary was compiled and edited by the late Rai Sahib Golap Chandra Barua in as early as 1920. Bimal Borpatragohain has compiled a Tai-Assamese dictionary in 2002.

There has not been much in-depth research conducted on this language. Among the linguists who studied the language in a scientific manner, the name of G. A. Grierson comes first. But his research is dated on as early as 1903. Besides, his study was based on the specimens prepared by the late Rai Sahib Golap Chandra

¹¹ Review from www.indologica.blogg.de

Barua and not on historical and other ancient documents. Hence, a systematic research of the language on the basis of current linguistic trends is urgently required. J. N. Phukan suitably remarks on this issue,

“An exhaustive study of this fascinating and an older branch of the Tai language in which numerous original works on various subjects composed at different historical periods are available, may throw new light on the linguistic problems of the Tai [Ahom] language. A study of this nature based on ancient chronicles, religious works, copper plates, inscriptions and other historical documents will not only help to determine its proper relationship to other branches of the same family but also give a definite picture of its word-formation, internal structure, grammatical rules and also of the tone which has almost been lost.”¹²

1.5 Methodology:

The method to be applied in this research work is the interview method, which is usually recommended in field investigation. The formation of questionnaire is based on the standard structure of *Lingua Descriptive Studies Questionnaire* (downloaded from <http://www.eva.mpg.de/lingua/>) from the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology, Leipzig. For the analysis of tones in the language, Speech Analyzer, Setup-ST15.EXE, the software from SIL (<http://www.sil.org/>) is adopted. Along with it, the documentary source method is adopted wherever it is required, as the work is about an endangered language. Specific methodology discussed by Abbi (2001) in *A Manual of Linguistic Fieldwork and Structures of Indian Languages* is adopted.

Regarding information details about informants (listed in Appendices), they are mainly from Patsaku village and Simaluguri of Sivasagar district in Upper Assam. Most of the Ahom priests, who are the only reliable source of the language, belong to this district. The average age level of the informants is 40-80, while some are even above 80. Other informants, basically consisting of new learners of Tai Ahom language, come between the age of 25 and 40.

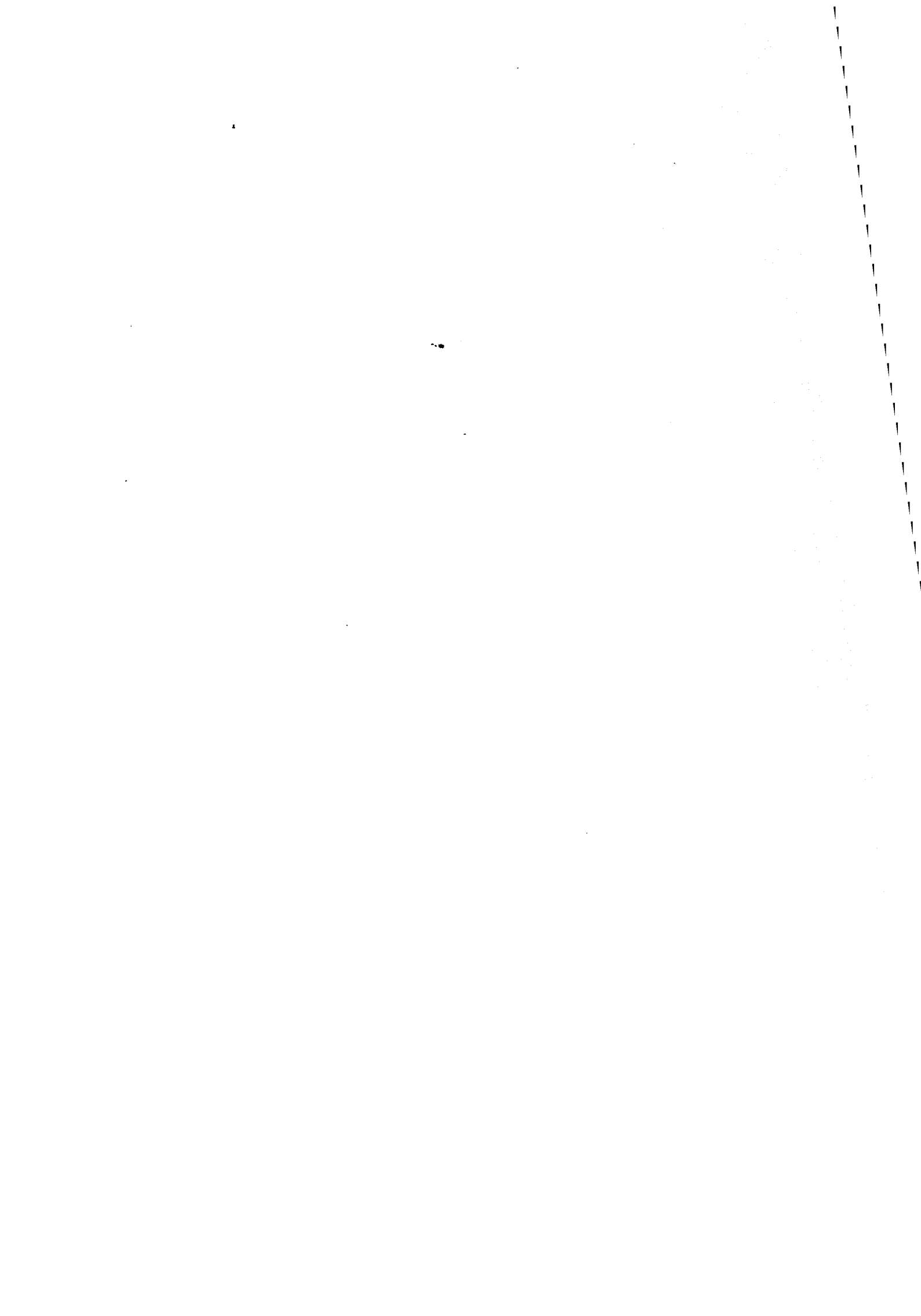
¹² Phukan, 9

1.6 Brief account of the chapters:

This research work is organized into five chapters discussing the linguistic and grammatical aspects of the Tai Ahom language in detail. The first chapter gives a laconic view of Tai Ahom including a cultural and historical overview, the demographic distribution and previous linguistic research conducted in the language. The second chapter includes phonetics and phonology briefing about the sound system of the language. Tai Ahom is a monosyllabic language, and it is tonal in nature. Although tones are not used any more by the present speakers of the language (discussed in section 2.3). It is interesting to find out phonological processes in the language. There are evident instances of palatalization and labialization in the language (discussed in section 2.2.7).

The third chapter talks about various morphological aspects of Tai Ahom. This chapter forms the crux of the research work as morphology plays one of the most significant roles in the structure of the Tai Ahom language. Different word classes in the language are described in detail. It is remarkable that the word formation process of Tai Ahom is mainly constituted of compounding. Various root words are combined together in order to derive different word classes. The presence of classifiers in a great number is another issue of interest (discussed in section 3.2.3.2). The fourth chapter includes syntactic issues of Tai Ahom. The word order of the language is SVO. Moreover, Tai Ahom features a good variety of word order patterns discussed in the chapter.

The fifth chapter describes the sociolinguistic aspects observed in the Tai Ahom language. The issues of language change and language contact are discussed thoroughly in section 5.2. As the language is completely surrounded by Indo-Aryan and Tibeto-Burman languages, the change is inevitable. Due to the profound influence of the Assamese language, Tai Ahom has seen some prominent transformation such as gradual loss of tonality and its eventual extinction. However, the language has some serious impact on Assamese as well (section 5.3). Assamese vocabulary is highly rich of Tai Ahom words. The Ahom kinship terms are still in use. However, the Tai Ahom language is already on the verge of extinction. Thanks to the collective awareness of the Ahom people, some rays of hope are coming to shine as the language is going through a revival process.



Chapter 2

Phonology

2.1 Introduction:

This chapter addresses the aspects of phonetics and phonology in Tai Ahom language. The principal topics in Ahom phonology are the Tai Ahom sound system including consonant clusters, a simple syllabic structure and other phonological processes. Section 2.2 elaborates a detailed discussion on the Ahom segmental including vowels and consonants. Tai Ahom follows a six vowels system along with a number of diphthongs. The language features a limited number of phonological processes including palatalization and labialization that are described in section 2.2.7. As a monosyllabic language, Tai Ahom demonstrates a simple syllabic structure, which is discussed in section 2.2.8. One of the most significant phonological features of the Ahom language is that it is a tonal language with tone being phonemic. Section 2.3 takes into a good account of the Ahom tone system.

2.2 Segmental:

2.2.1 Vowels:

The Tai Ahom language has a six vowels system including /i e a o ɔ u/. There is a contrast of the position and height of the tongue as well as the rounding of lips in the articulation of the vowels. Note that there is no central vowel in Tai Ahom. Examples are given below,

	Front	Central	Back
High	i		u
Mid	e		o
Low			a ɔ

Figure 2.1: Vowels in Tai Ahom.

/i/ (high front unrounded vowel)

/khit/ 'frog' /bin/ 'to fly'

/e/ (mid front unrounded vowel)

/ten/ 'to sit' /le/ 'to lick'

/a/ (low back unrounded vowel)

/an/ 'to count' /man/ 'he'

/o/ (mid back rounded vowel)

/kon/ 'man' /oi/ 'sugarcane'

/ɔ/ (low back rounded vowel)

/hon/ 'to prepare' /ɔk/ 'outside'

/u/ (high back rounded vowel)

/hu/ 'cow' /phut/ 'ghost'

2.2.2 Consonants:

In the context of consonants, Tai Ahom has a four-way distinction of voiced, voiceless, aspirated and unaspirated sounds. There are no voiced aspirates in modern Tai Ahom. The consonants are /p ph b t th d c j k kh m n ŋ r s h l/. There are five other consonants that were present in old Tai Ahom but are obsolete now. These are /bh dh g gh jh/.

	Bilabial	Alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Stops					
vl.unasp	<i>p</i>	<i>t</i>		<i>k</i>	
vl.asp	<i>ph</i>	<i>th</i>		<i>kh</i>	
vd.unasp	<i>b</i>	<i>d</i>			
Affricates					
vl.unasp			<i>c</i>		
vd.unasp			<i>ɟ</i>		
Nasals					
	<i>m</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>ɲ</i>	<i>ŋ</i>	
Trill					
		<i>r</i>			
Fricatives					
vl.		<i>s</i>			<i>h</i>
Lateral					
Approximant					
		<i>l</i>			

Figure 2.2: Consonants in Tai Ahom.

Examples of the Tai Ahom consonants are given below.

a) Stops

/p/ (voiceless unaspirated bilabial stop)

/pat/ ‘gem’ */bap/* ‘to rob’

/ph/ (voiceless aspirated bilabial stop)

/pha/ ‘king’ */phi/* ‘God’

/b/ (voiced unaspirated bilabial stop)

/but/ ‘blind’ */bab/* ‘negative marker’

/t/ (voiceless unaspirated alveolar stop)

/tap/ ‘anger’ */lat/* ‘to speak’

/th/ (voiceless aspirated alveolar stop)

/thəŋ/ ‘hole’ */them/* ‘to fill’

/d/ (voiced unaspirated alveolar stop)

/den/ ‘boundary’ */duk/* ‘bone’

/k/ (voiceless unaspirated velar stop)

/kat/ ‘market’ */kek/* ‘to sob’

/kh/ (voiceless aspirated velar stop)

/khit/ ‘frog’ */khun/* ‘to mix’

b) Affricates

/c/ (voiceless unaspirated palatal affricate)

/cao/ ‘honorificity marker’ */cip/* ‘fever’

/j/ (voiced unaspirated palatal affricate)

/jɔp/ ‘to stumble’ */jan/* ‘to glitter’

c) Nasals

/m/ (voiced bilabial nasal)

/mak/ ‘fruit’ */bum/* ‘dumb’

/n/ (voiced alveolar nasal)

/nak/ ‘heavy’ */phan/* ‘to cut’

/ɲ/ (voiced palatal nasal)

/ɲao/ ‘to scratch’ */muɲ/* ‘fog’

/ŋ/ (voiced velar nasal)

/ŋin/ 'to hear' /rɔŋ/ 'to lift'

d) Trill

/r/ (voiced alveolar trill)

/rin/ 'stone'

Example of trills in cluster position is very rare in the language¹. For instance,

/tra/ 'rupee'

e) Fricatives

/s/ (voiceless alveolar fricative)

/sun/ 'garden' /sin/ 'to curse'

/h/ (voiceless glottal fricative)

/hañ/ 'to see' /heŋ/ 'dry'

f) Lateral

/l/ (voiced alveolar lateral)

/lij/ 'monkey' /blɔk/ 'flower'

2.2.3 Minimal pairs:

The minimal pairs in Tai Ahom language are the following. The contrasting pairs, both consonants and vowels are compared with their phonetic characteristics.

a) Vowels

/i/ : /e/

[i] - high front unrounded vowel

[e] - mid front unrounded vowel

¹ Consonant clusters in Tai Ahom are discussed later in this chapter (Section 2.2.5).

/ij/ 'to lean' */ej/* 'to prostrate'

/klin/ 'to drink' */klen/* 'to rub'

/ti/ 'place' */te/* 'true'

/u:/ */o/*

[*u*] - high back rounded vowel

[*o*] - mid back rounded vowel

/u/ and */o/* can not be contrasted word initially as */o/* does not usually occur initially.

However, there is one example where they can be contrasted initially.

/ui/ 'happiness' */oi/* 'sugarcane'

/tuk/ 'to fall' */tok/* 'to measure'

/tu/ 'animal' */to/* 'to fight'

/o:/ */ɔ/*

[*o*] - mid back rounded vowel

[*ɔ*] - low back rounded vowel

/oi/ 'sugarcane' */ɔi/* 'to feed'

/tok/ 'to measure' */tɔk/* 'rupee'

/ro/ 'to dye' */rɔ/* 'offshoot'

/u:/ */ɔ/*

[*u*] - high back rounded vowel

[*ɔ*] - low back rounded vowel

/uk/ 'all' */ɔk/* 'outside'

/pun/ 'island' */pɔn/* 'to rub'

/ru/ 'head' */rɔ/* 'offshoot'

b) Consonants

/k/ : /ŋ/

[*k*] - voiceless unaspirated velar stop

[*ŋ*] - voiced unaspirated velar nasal

/kiŋ/ 'to eat' */ŋin/* 'to hear'

/kak/ 'wick' */kaŋ/* 'to hide'

It is important that there is no minimal pair in Tai Ahom that shows contrast in consonant sounds in word medial position.

/p/ : /b/

[*p*] - voiceless unaspirated bilabial stop

[*b*] - voiced unaspirated bilabial stop

/pat/ 'gem' */bat/* 'once'

/p/ and */b/* do not show contrast in word final position as */b/* does not occur word finally. There is just one example of its final occurrence */bab/* 'a negative marker'. In that case, the contrast can be shown word finally,

/bap/ 'to rob' */bab/* 'a negative marker'

/t/ : /d/

[*t*] - voiceless unaspirated alveolar stop

[*d*] - voiced unaspirated alveolar stop

/tuk/ 'to fall' */duk/* 'bone'

/t/ and /d/ never show any contrast in word final position as /d/ does not occur word finally in Tai Ahom.

/c/ : /ʃ/

[c] - voiceless unaspirated palatal affricate

[ʃ] - voiced unaspirated palatal affricate

/caŋ/ 'elephant' /ʃaŋ/ 'to glitter'

Similarly, /c/ and /ʃ/ also do not show contrast in word final position as /c/ and /ʃ/ do not occur word finally.

c) Tonemes

Minimal pairs can also be found in tonemes, although to a limited range. Tonemes are actually a type of phoneme, where the smallest contrastive unit is conditioned by the variants of the tones of the adjoining syllables. Examples are,

/kã/ 'to go'

/kã/ 'crow'

/kâ/ 'to trade'

/ka/ 'perfective aspect marker'

/hañ/ 'to see'

/han/ 'swan'

/kiñ/ 'to eat'

/kin/ 'to enjoy'

/bañ/ 'village'

/ban/ 'to pray'

/saŋ/ 'if'

/saŋ/ 'to know'

2.2.4 Diphthongs:

Diphthongs or vowel sequences are common in Tai Ahom language. They are /iu eu ai ao au oi ou ɔi /. Among them, /ai /, /ɔi /and /ao / are quite frequent. Examples of diphthongs are,

/iu/

/phiu/ 'bracelet'

/riu/ 'to uproot'

/iu/ 'to cry'

/eu/

/neu/ 'inside' */ceu/* 'to think'

/ai/

/cai/ 'to break' */pai/* 'to go'

/ai/ 'to feel shame'

/ao/

/thao/ 'old' */lao/* 'to say'

/ao/ 'to take'

/au/

/sau/ 'twenty' */bau/* 'to praise'

/oi/

/mojn/ 'haughtiness' */noi/* 'kind of fly'

/oi/ 'sugarcane'

/ou/

/mou/ 'you'

/ɔi/

/sɔi/ 'help' */nɔi/* 'small'

/ɔi/ 'to feed'

There is another diphthong */ui/*, which is not so frequently used in the language. For example, */ui/* 'happiness'.

2.2.5 Consonant clusters:

According to the elderly Ahom speakers, the clustering phenomenon is quite recent in the language. The explanation goes to the strong influence of Assamese, the dominant Indo-Aryan language spoken in Assam. Only liquids, i.e., the consonants // and /r/ can be clustered with other consonants and that too in a limited range. The consonant clusters in Tai Ahom are given below. Among these, /bl/ and /mr/ are rarely found whereas other clusters are plentiful in the language. It is important that Ahom consonants can be clustered usually in word initial position, which is typically rare in its neighboring Tibeto-Burman languages². For example,

/kl/

/klin/ 'to drink' */klu/* 'salt' */klaŋ/* 'middle'

/khr/

/khru/ 'to happen' */khrai/* 'sick'

/phr/

/phra/ 'god' */phriŋ/* 'to distribute'

/pl/

/plao/ 'empty' */ploŋ/* 'to select'

/ml/

/mlen/ 'to open the eyes' */mleu/* 'a tomcat'

/bl/

/blok/ 'flower'

² Abbi (2003), in *A Manual of Linguistic Fieldwork and Structures of Indian Languages*.

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/mr/

/mrat/ ‘camel’

2.2.6 Distribution processes:

2.2.6.1 Distribution of vowels:

All the vowels can occur in the initial, medial and final positions except */o/*, which occurs only in medial and final positions. It can occur in an initial position only when it is compounded with */i/* as a diphthong, i.e., */oi/*. For example,

Vowels	Initial	Medial	Final
<i>i</i>	<i>/iŋ/</i> ‘to lean’	<i>/kiŋ/</i> ‘to eat’	<i>/phi/</i> ‘god’
<i>e</i>	<i>/en/</i> ‘young’	<i>/ben/</i> ‘to fall’	<i>/me/</i> ‘mother’
<i>a</i>	<i>/ap/</i> ‘to bathe’	<i>/ɲak/</i> ‘delicate’	<i>/ta/</i> ‘to sow’
<i>o</i>	X	<i>/kon/</i> ‘person’	<i>/to/</i> ‘to fight’
<i>ɔ</i>	<i>/ɔŋ/</i> ‘to move’	<i>/mɔt/</i> ‘quality’	<i>/rɔ/</i> ‘to dye’
<i>u</i>	<i>/uk/</i> ‘all’	<i>/bug/</i> ‘low’	<i>/ru/</i> ‘head’

Table 2.1: *Vowel positioning in Tai Ahom.*

Occurrence of diphthongs is usually in word initial and final positions in the Ahom language. However, in terms of word initial position, only five diphthongs can occur in a VV syllabic structure. These diphthongs are */iu ai ao oi ɔi/*. The other three diphthongs - */au/*, */eu/* and */ou/* - can occur only in word final position. The diphthongs */ɔi/* and */oi/* can also occur medially. Examples are given below.

Diphthongs	Initial	Medial	Final
<i>ai</i>	<i>/ai/</i> ‘shyness’	X	<i>/kai/</i> ‘bridge’
<i>ao</i>	<i>/ao/</i> ‘to take’	X	<i>/cao/</i> ‘owner’
<i>au</i>	X	X	<i>/tau/</i> ‘fault’
<i>eu</i>	X	X	<i>/neu/</i> ‘inside’
<i>iu</i>	<i>/iu/</i> ‘to cry’	X	<i>/kiu/</i> ‘to taste’
<i>ɔi</i>	<i>/ɔi/</i> ‘to feed’	<i>/mɔɲ/</i> ‘pride’	<i>/hɔi/</i> ‘oyster’

<i>oi</i>	/oi/ 'sugarcane'	/doin/ 'to shave'	/poi/ 'kind of fly'
<i>ou</i>	X	X	/mou/ 'you'
<i>ui</i>	/ui/ 'happiness'		

Table 2.2: Diphthong positioning in Tai Ahom.

2.2.6.2 Distribution of consonants or Phonotactics:

All consonants in Tai Ahom usually occur word initially. Only // and /r/ can occur medially (in the second position), when combined with other consonants as clusters. Consonants that occur in the word final position are /p k ŋ n m t ɲ/. Among them, the first five are quite frequent in the language. In case of /b/, there is only one instance of its occurrence in word final position so far - /bab/, a negative marker. Examples are given below,

Consonants	Initial	Medial	Final
<i>p</i>	/pak/ 'to become'	X	/sap/ 'to kiss'
<i>k</i>	/koi/ 'alone'	X	/kək/ 'to worship'
<i>ŋ</i>	/ŋa/ 'to aim at'	X	/kŋŋ/ 'ginger'
<i>l</i>	/lak/ 'thief'	/pla/ 'fish'	X
<i>ph</i>	/pha/ 'king'	X	X
<i>n</i>	/nak/ 'heavy'	X	/pan/ 'foreign'
<i>kh</i>	/khe/ 'harm'	X	X
<i>m</i>	/mak/ 'fruit'	X	/mam/ 'boiled rice'
<i>t</i>	/ta/ 'eye'	X	/tat/ 'to bear'
<i>s</i>	/seu/ 'army'	X	X
<i>c</i>	/cao/ 'great'	X	X
<i>d</i>	/dek/ 'moon'	X	X
<i>r</i>	/rit/ 'to press'	/phra/ 'god'	X
<i>th</i>	/thom/ 'to listen'	X	X
<i>b</i>	/ba/ 'to say'	X	X
<i>ɲ</i>	/ɲap/ 'distress'	X	/teɲ/ 'grasshopper'
<i>j</i>	/jik/ 'damp'	X	X

<i>h</i>	<i>/haŋ/</i> 'to see'	X	X
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Table 2.3: Consonant positioning in Tai Ahom.

One of the most significant observations in the Ahom consonants is the nature of interchangeability or free variation of consonants */h/* and */r/*. These two consonants are interchangeable when occurring in word initial position before all front and back vowels except the mid back rounded short vowel */o/*. For instance,

/hak/ or */rak/* 'to love'

/hək/ or */rək/* 'spear'

/hao/ or */rao/* 'we'

/hai/ or */rai/* 'to shine'

/hən/ or */rən/* 'never'

/həŋ/ or */rəŋ/* 'to invite'

/haŋ/ or */raŋ/* 'objective case marker'

/hin/ or */rin/* 'stone'

/huj/ or */ruj/* 'stream'

/hen/ or */ren/* 'house'

/hu/ or */ru/* 'head'

It is notable from the examples that */h/* and */r/* are interchangeable in certain conditions. We can classify them as following,

- */h/* interchanges with */r/* when followed by front and back vowels with word final nasal consonants.
- The interchangeability also takes place when the word final consonant is a voiceless unaspirated velar stop.
- */h/* and */r/* are interchangeable when followed by diphthongs */ao/* and */ai/*.
- */h/* does not interchange with */r/* if followed by the low front unrounded vowel */a/* with the alveolar nasal */n/* as word final consonant.

2.2.7 Phonological processes:

The features of palatalization and labialization are present in Tai Ahom, although to a very limited range. For instance, palatalization has been found with the voiceless unaspirated stops /k t/ and with // so far. Labialization is found to occur with only /k/. It is important to note that /k/, /t/ and // can be palatalized when followed by front vowel /e/ while labialization can occur when followed by back vowel /ɔ/. However, there are exceptions as well. Palatalization can also happen with the high back vowel /u/ at the word final position, although there is just one example to prove it. Whereas labialization is allowed when followed by the low back vowel /a/, which again has just one example. Therefore, we can say that frontness and backness are prominent in phonological processes of Tai Ahom. Examples are given below.

a) Palatalization

/k^hu/ 'to stare'

/k^hej/ 'a Buddhist monastery'

/t^hem/ 'to write'

/t^hem/ 'to visit'

b) Labialization

/k^waŋ/ 'curved'

/k^wɔ/ 'alone'

It is assumed that palatalization and labialization might have been frequent in old Ahom language, but in course of time, these two phonological processes have lost their presence and now confined only to the examples above.

2.2.8 Syllabic structure:

As Tai Ahom is a monosyllabic language, so the syllabic structure is simple. The following types of syllabic structure are observed in the language,

V

/a/ 'to open'

VV

/ao/ 'to take' */iu/* 'to cry'

VC

/ik/ 'to limp' */ip/* 'to finish'

CV

/ma/ 'to come' */be/* 'to bark'

CVV

/cao/ 'owner' */mɔi/* 'to get tired'

CVC

/lan/ 'grandson' */ceŋ/* 'a kind of fly'

CCV

/tra/ 'a rupee' */plu/* 'betel leaf'

CCVC

/khrɔŋ/ 'goods' */pluŋ/* 'half'

CCVV

/phrai/ 'to go for a walk' */klɔi/* 'to go slowly'

CVVC

/doin/ 'to shave' */dojŋ/* 'hill'

CCVVC

/khrɔin/ 'crocodile'

Among these syllabic structures, CV and CVC are most frequent in the language. CCV, CCVC, CCVV and CCVVC structures can occur in the context of consonant clusters. CVVC and CCVVC are not so common in Tai Ahom.

2.3 Suprasegmentals:

2.3.1 Tones:

It is notable that all the branches of Tai languages, more or less, use tones (more than one). For example³,

Shan - 5 tones

Lao - 6 tones

Thai - 5 tones

Dioi - 7 tones

Nung - 5 tones

Khamti - 6 tones

Tai Ahom also used tones. Grierson (1903) also discussed the tone system of Ahom language indicating that the language followed 5 tones - natural, grave, straightforward, high and emphatic tones. However, Grierson's classification can not be considered to be of much relevance for studying the current tone system of Tai Ahom. But it is now difficult to say the exact number of tones originally used in the language. The difficulty arises mainly due to two reasons -

- Tai Ahom has ceased to be the spoken language of the Ahoms who use Assamese now, as a result of which the full use of tones has fallen into disuse.
- The Tai Ahom language does not possess any system of elaborate tone marks, which is employed in modern Thai, one of the most widely spoken Tai languages of present time.

However, it can be strongly assumed that the Tai Ahom language contained five to six

³ Gohain, A. (1997) mentions the tones of various Tai languages in *Elementary Tai Primer with Grammar*.

general tone variations. These tones are⁴,

T1 - level tone with slight rising at the end, e.g., /kā̃/ 'to go'

T2 - high tone, e.g., /ká/ 'crow'

T3 - grave tone with glottal stop, e.g., /ka,ʔ/ 'paddy'

T4 - falling tone, e.g., /kã/ 'to trade'

T5 - grave tone, e.g., /ka/ 'costly'

T6 - high rising tone, e.g., /kã/ 'exclamation'

It is important to mention that not all of these tones are equally exercised by all speakers. Moreover, variation in tones can be seen among different speakers.

2.3.2 Current tone system:

The current picture of tonality in Tai Ahom supports the fact that tones are no longer in use among the Ahom speakers. The new learners do not have enough satisfying data or convincing source to acquire tones whereas the few old speakers prefer not to use them due to the ambiguity over the classification of tones. However, there are three tones currently observed although not so frequently among the new learners of Tai Ahom. These tones are -

T1 - level tone with slight rising at the end, e.g., /kā̃/ 'to go'

T2 - high tone, e.g., /ká/ 'crow'

T3 - low tone /kã/ 'to trade'

2.4 Conclusion:

The phonological structure of the Ahom language is simple. It is a monosyllabic language with the presence of tones as a phonemic feature. The language follows a six vowels system with front and back vowels. All the vowels occur in word initial, medial and final positions except /o/ which does not occur word initially. It can occur in the initial position only when combined as a diphthong /oi/.

⁴ Gohain, A. (1997) in the introduction, *Elementary Tai Primer with Grammar*.

Most of the diphthongs usually occur in word initial and final positions in Tai Ahom. However, /au/, /eu/ and /ou/ can occur only in word final position.

All consonants in Ahom can occur word initially. There are few consonants occurring word finally. Consonants such as // and /r/ can also occur word medially when combined with other consonants as clusters. There is also the aspect of free variation between /h / and /r / under certain conditions. Regarding phonological processes, we can say that palatalization and labialization occur when followed by front and back vowels respectively. As a monosyllabic language, Tai Ahom usually shows CV and CVC syllable structures. However, there are several types of syllabic structure observed in the language, including V, VV, VC, CVV, CCV, CCVV, and so on. Minimal pairs in Tai Ahom can be contrasted on the basis of vowels, consonants and even tonemes to a limited extent.

One of the most important aspects in the Ahom phonology is its tone system. Tai Ahom is a tonal language with tone being phonemic. Ancient Ahom used tones as many as six. However, the use of tones is a little complicated issue now as the present Ahom speakers prefer to use it very less or not at all. Several reasons can be attributed to the gradual disuse of tones among Ahom speakers. But the most important factor is that the Ahom people do not use the language as their mother tongue, which is now replaced by Assamese, the Indo-Aryan language of Assam. The use of Ahom language is currently confined to only religious functions and prayer songs. Besides, the language does not have any elaborate system of tone marks as maintained in modern Thai, another language of the Tai language family. Therefore, it is difficult to indicate the exact number of tones the Ahom speakers use today. Although three tones have been noticed to be in use during the fieldwork, the numbers keep fluctuating among various Ahom speakers.

Chapter 3

Morphology

3.1 Introduction:

This chapter broadly deals with the various morphological aspects of the Ahom language. Morphological description formulates the crux of the Ahom language. Section 3.2 describes the different word structures found in the language, including various ways of compounding of different word classes. Sections 3.2.1.2 and 3.2.1.3 probe deeply into the aspect of number and gender of Tai Ahom respectively. The case markers in Tai Ahom are described in detail in section 3.2.1.5. Adjectives in Tai Ahom are discussed in section 3.2.2.1. Section 3.2.2.2 discusses various types of adverbs used in the language. Whereas section 3.2.3.1 talks about different numerals (cardinals, ordinals, etc.) used in the Ahom language. The Ahom language is quite rich in classifiers. Section 3.2.3.2 discusses different types of Ahom classifiers with plenty of examples.

The use of tense, aspect and mood in the Tai Ahom language is discussed in detail under section 3.2.4.2. The construction of Explicator Compound Verbs or ECV is also evident in the language (Section 3.2.4.2.3.3). As the language is monosyllabic in nature, compounding plays a significant role in the word formation processes of the Ahom language. Section 3.3 discusses the different word formation processes of Tai Ahom. There are two main processes - compounding and reduplication. Both are discussed at length in this section. Different ways of forming compound nouns in the language are elaborated with examples in section 3.3.1.

3.2 Word structures:

The Tai languages spoken in Assam are isolating in nature. Each word has its own individual form. Grierson mentions¹,

“Each simple word is a monosyllable, which never changes its shape, which gives the idea of one or more root meanings...each monosyllabic word in these languages may have several meanings, and...these are primarily

¹ Grierson (1903), General Introduction.

differentiated by the use of tones."

Grierson further talks about compounding, where two **different** words with independent meaning are juxtaposed to form a new **word**. This system of compounding is typical in Siamese-Chinese languages, as **pointed out** by Grierson.

Compounding is one of the most significant aspects in Tai Ahom, when it comes to formation of words and different word classes.

3.2.1 Nominal morphology:

3.2.1.1 Nouns:

Nouns in Tai Ahom are of two types in general - **root words** (non-derived words) and compounds. The rich existence of compounds is **due to the** monosyllabic nature of the Ahom language. Among the root words are the **common** nouns and mass nouns. For example,

/kon/ 'man'

/lij/ 'monkey'

/hu/ 'cow'

/din/ 'soil'

/nam/ 'water'

/pha/ 'cloth'

Compounds in Tai Ahom are formed by juxtaposing **root words** one after the other, where modifier follows the modified. There are several **ways** of forming these compound nouns. For example,

a) Noun + Noun

/kon-tai/ (man+Tai) 'Tai people'

/nam-khe/ (water+river) 'river water'

/nam-nɔŋ/ (water+lake) 'lake water'

/tek-mai/ (box+wood) 'wooden box'

/tek-lik/ (box+iron) 'iron box'

/phak-pla/ (curry+fish) 'fish curry'

/phak-nu/ (curry+meat) 'meat curry'

b) Noun + Adjective

/dɔi-tam/ (hill+low) 'hillock'

/phaŋ-phok/ (foreigner+white) 'an English man'

/din-phok/ (soil+white) 'chalk'

c) Noun + Verb

/ti-kin/ (place+eat) 'eating place'

/ti-nɔn/ (place+sleep) 'bed'

/ti-taŋ/ (place+cook) 'cooking place'

/ti-naŋ/ (place+sit) 'chair'

/din-si/ (soil+burn) 'brick'

/ti-sɔn/ (place+learn) 'school'

/luk-liŋ/ (child+adopt) 'adopted child'

d) Verb + Noun

/saŋ-kham/ (clean+gold) 'goldsmith'

/saŋ-lik/ (clean+iron) 'ironsmith'

/saŋ-mɔ/ (clean+earthen pot) 'potter'

e) Verb + Verb

/saŋ-sak/ (clean+wash) 'washer man'

/saŋ-kan/ (clean+slip) 'wrestler'

/saŋ-mai/ (clean+burn) 'cook'

If the compound word is a **collective noun**², then it is possible to **add some** root words or other compound words **with it in order** to mean another **collective noun**. For example,

/rɔŋ-ren / or /hɔŋ-hen / (lift+house)

‘institute, school’

/hɔŋ-hen-sɔn-lik / (lift+house+learn+book)

‘school (where reading and writing are taught)’

/hɔŋ-hen-sɔn-lai-mu / (lift+house+learn+line+draw)

‘handicrafts training school’

/hɔŋ-hen-sɔn-to-lai / (lift+house+learn+weave+line)

‘weaving school’

/hɔŋ-hen-sɔn-pin-sa-ru / (lift+house+learn+get+good+knowledge)

‘teacher’s training institute’

3.2.1.2 Number:

The number system of Tai Ahom language includes **singular** and **plural numbers**. It is notable that the singular number always follows **the noun** whereas the **plural** can both precede and follow the noun. The word denoting **singular** number is */leŋ /*. Words indicating plural number are mentioned below.

/nam / ‘many’

/nam nam / ‘very much’

/lai / ‘several’

/lai lai / ‘in a large number’

² A collective noun is the name given to a collection or group of persons or things taken as a single group or entity.

/kam phrɔŋ / or / maŋ phrɔŋ / 'some'

/khao / 'a plural suffix'

/taŋ lai / or / taŋ luŋ / 'all'

/taŋ muk / 'all in the crowd'

/taŋ meŋ / 'all the public'

/phruŋ / or / puk / 'crowd, herd'

/sam / 'of the same age'

Examples of the singular and plural numbers are given below.

(1) */lai kon ma pa nai /*
several man come side this
'Many men are coming this way'

(2) */kon nam nam lai lai ma pa nai /*
man very much in a large number come side this
'A large number of men are coming this way'

(3) */hu-khao taŋ lai ju klaŋ na kɔi /*
cow-3p all be middle field PERF
'All the cows are in the middle of the field'

Sometimes, a word in singular number may also mean in plural number without any plural denoting word being added to it. For example,

(4) */kon muŋ rɔn ŋin khɔm muŋ /*
man state affairs hear speech country
'All the audience heard the speech about the state affairs of the country'

A singular word may mean plural in the context of its addition to plural words in first, second or third person. For example,

<i>/kon-rao/</i>	man-1p	'our men'
<i>/kon-su/</i>	man-2p	'your men'
<i>/kon-khao/</i>	man-3p	'their men'

In order to signify singular number, the marker */leŋ/* is added after the noun that is either preceded or followed by the appropriate classifier³. For example,

(5) */kon-mi leŋ/*
CL-woman one
'one woman'

(6) */saŋ-tu leŋ/*
elephant-CL one
'one elephant'

(7) */khrɔi-ku leŋ/*
buffalo-CL one
'one pair of buffaloes'

In case of numerals other than 'one', they are added before the noun that is followed by the classifier. Or, after the noun and then followed by the appropriate classifier. The two orders of words will be the following. Examples are given below.

1) Numeral + noun + classifier

2) Noun + numeral + classifier

(8) */ha saŋ-tu/*
five elephant-CL
'five elephants'

³ Classifiers are discussed in section 3.2.3.2 in this chapter.

(9) /*sao pet-thek* /
 twenty duck-MG
 ‘twenty male ducks’

(10) /*kon si-sip phu* /
 man forty CL
 ‘forty men’

If /*leŋ* / follows the noun and precedes the classifier, or a noun precedes the classifier and is followed by a numeral, then it does not mean a number but the order of place. For example,

- a) Noun + /*leŋ* / + classifier
- b) Noun + classifier + numeral

(11) /*kon leŋ phu* /
 man one CL
 ‘the first man’

(12) /*luk-cai phu si* /
 child-MG CL four
 ‘the fourth boy’

In case of kinship terms, the 3rd person plural marker /*khao* / is added before the noun to make it plural. For example,

(13) /*khao noŋ man* /
 3p sister brother
 ‘sisters and brothers’

(14) /*khao pu-lin-pu-mun* /
 3p great-grandfather

'ancestors'

To pluralize articles, **seeds of plants or things alike**, /*taŋ*/ is **added after the noun**. For example,

- (15) /*khroŋ-liŋ taŋ* /
 goods PL
 'goods'
- (16) /*mak-mu taŋ* /
 CL-betel nut PL
 'betel nuts'
- (17) /*khrai-kai khrai-pet taŋ* /
 egg-fowl egg-duck PL
 'eggs of the poultry'

Regarding pluralizing **animals**, words such as /*phriŋ, phruŋ*/ (meaning 'herd, flock') are added after the noun. For example,

- (18) /*hu-tu sam phruŋ* /
 cow-CL three PL
 'three herds of cows'
- (19) /*nuŋ-pet leŋ phriŋ* /
 CL-duck one PL
 'first flock of ducks'
- (20) /*kai then phruŋ leŋ* /
 fowl forest PL one
 'a flock of wild fowl'

3.2.1.3 Gender:

It is remarkable that there is no syntactic gender agreement in Tai Ahom language. Instead, there are separate words denoting male and female identities that are added to other masculine or feminine words as prefixes or suffixes to mark the two genders. For example,

Masculine	Feminine
/pɔ/ 'father'	/mè/ 'mother'
/pu/ 'grand father'	/ja/ 'grand mother'
/phu/ 'husband'	/mi/ 'wife'
/cao/ 'king, owner'	/naŋ/ 'queen, lady'
/cai/ 'male'	/peŋ/ 'female'
/cai/ 'brother'	/sau/ 'sister'
/khun/ 'minister'	/sai/ 'lady'

Table 3.1: Gender in Tai Ahom.

Words denoting male and female (as mentioned above) are compounded with other words in order to formulate various words. Especially, kinship terms in Tai Ahom language are constructed in this way. The words indicating genders are suffixed with the kinship words. For example,

/luk-cai/	child-MG	'male child (son)'
/luk-peŋ/	child-FG	'female child (daughter)'
/nɔŋ-cai/	young-brother+MG	'younger brother'
/nɔŋ-sau/	young-sister+FG	'younger sister'

In case of biped and quadruped animals, /phu / and /thek / are used respectively in order to denote masculine gender. Whereas, /me / is used to denote feminine gender in both cases. For example,

a) Biped animals

<i>/kai-phu/</i>	fowl-MG	‘cock’
<i>/kai-me/</i>	fowl-FG	‘hen’
<i>/nuḱ-phu/</i>	bird-MG	‘male bird’
<i>/nuḱ-me/</i>	bird-FG	‘female bird’

b) Quadruped animals

<i>/saŋ-thek/</i>	elephant-MG	‘male elephant’
<i>/saŋ-me/</i>	elephant-FG	‘female elephant’
<i>/ma-thek/</i>	horse-MG	‘horse’
<i>/ma-me/</i>	horse-FG	‘mare’

It is significant that prefixing or suffixing the gender markers in Tai Ahom indicates different connotations. For example,

<i>/kai-me/</i>	fowl-FG	‘hen’
<i>/mè-kai/</i>	FG-fowl	‘mother hen that has chickens ’
<i>/hu-me/</i>	cow-FG	‘female cow’
<i>/mè-hu/</i>	FG-cow	‘mother cow’

Similarly,

<i>/saŋ-thek/</i>	elephant-MG	‘male elephant, either big or small ’
<i>/thek-saŋ/</i>	MG-elephant	‘big-sized or father elephant ’
<i>/ma-thek/</i>	horse-MG	‘male horse’
<i>/thek-ma/</i>	MG-horse	‘big-sized or father horse ’

There are some natural objects like the sun or the moon that are generally accepted as masculine in Tai Ahom. Whereas, some words are always used as feminine. In both cases, the markers are usually prefixed. However, gender marking is optional here. For example,

<i>/khun-den /</i>	MG-moon	‘the moon god’
<i>/khun-ban /</i>	MG-sun	‘the sun god’
<i>/khun-phun /</i>	MG-rain	‘the rain god’

Similarly,

<i>/me-nam /</i>	FG-river	‘river’
<i>/me-mu /</i>	FG-hand	‘the thumb of the hand’
<i>/me-tin /</i>	FG-foot	‘the thumb of the foot’
<i>/me-lik /</i>	FG-letter	‘the alphabets’

[ban]me-pi / [day]FG-year

‘the last day of the tenth month of the year’

3.2.1.4 Pronouns:

3.2.1.4.1 Personal pronouns:

Here are the personal pronouns used in the Tai Ahom language.

Person	Singular	Plural
1 st	<i>kao</i>	<i>hao, rao</i>
2 nd	<i>mou</i>	<i>su</i>
3 rd	<i>man</i>	<i>khao</i>

Table 3.2: *Personal pronouns in Tai Ahom.*

As visible in the table above, the term */man /* is used to denote both genders in the third person singular pronoun. Personal pronouns also carry the aspect of honorificity. There are two markers of honorificity added to both second and third person pronouns - */cao /* and */man /*. The speakers prefer to use the former one as it is considered more honorific than the latter. For example,

/man-cao /

3s+HON

'he/she (HON)'

/mou-man/

2s+HON

'you (HON)'

/khao-man/

3p+HON

'they (HON)'

/su-cao/

2p+HON

'you (HON)'

Sometimes, */kha/*, another marker of honorificity is added after first person pronouns, in the context of a younger speaker conversing with an elder one.

3.2.1.4.2 Reflexive pronouns:

In case of reflexive pronouns, the term */pa-cao/* is added after personal pronouns. For example,

/kao pa-cao/ 'I myself'

/mou pa-cao/ 'you yourself'

/man pa-cao/ 's/he her/himself'

/taj/ can also be used after personal pronouns in order to perform the same function. The interesting aspect to observe here is that the personal pronoun is reduplicated in such way that this reflexive marker comes in between the reduplicated personal pronouns. For instance,

/kao taj kao/ 'I myself'

/man taj man/ 's/he her/himself'

In case of honorific means, first person plural number, i.e., /hao / or /rao / becomes /ha / or /ra / respectively. Similarly in case of first person singular number, /tu/ replaces /kao /. For example,

- (21) /ra-kha-ra jen-pin lak-nak /
 HON+1p-REF-HON+1p create weapons
 ‘We ourselves created weapons’

- (22) /cao-pha phet khan
 king bend speak
 kham tu oi /
 word REF+HON+1s EXCL
 ‘The king bent to speak a word to me myself!’

3.2.1.4.3 Interrogative pronouns:

The widely used interrogative pronouns in Tai Ahom are - /saŋ, se, ka-saŋ, phreu, neu, an, an-phreu, an-neu /. Examples for these interrogative pronouns are given below.

- (23) /cu mou ka-saŋ /
 name 2s what
 ‘What is your name?’

- (24) /ka-saŋ mou la /
 what 2s want
 ‘What do you want?’

- (25) /phreu ma ma /
 who come come
 ‘Who else is coming?’

(26) /*phreu ba saŋ* /
 who say what
 ‘Who said what?’

(27) /*an-neu mou la* /
 which one 2s want
 ‘Which one do you want?’

(28) /*an-phreu pi nai* /
 which-who pen this
 ‘Whose is this pen?’

(29) /*pi phreu-an nai* /
 pen who-which this
 ‘Whose pen is this?’

With regard to indicating cases, the case ~~markers~~ are used concurrently with the interrogative pronouns. It is notably evident ~~that the~~ case marker always precedes the interrogative pronoun. In such contexts, the ~~case~~ marker generally occurs in the beginning of the sentence. For example,

(30) /*luŋ phreu mou ma* /
 INS who 2s come
 ‘With whom have you come?’

(31) /*luk se nai ma* /
 ABL what this get
 ‘What did you get this from?’

- (32) /luk se saŋ pin ma/
 ABL what what start get
 ‘What did it get started from?’

3.2.1.4.4 Demonstrative pronouns:

The two demonstrative pronouns are /nai/ or /an-nai/ ‘this’, and /nan/ or /an-nan/ ‘that’. For example,

- (33) /an-nai pi kao/
 DEM pen 1s
 ‘This is my pen’

- (34) /an-nan pi man/
 DEM pen 3s
 ‘That is his pen’

3.2.1.4.5 Indefinite pronouns:

The indefinite pronouns in the Ahom language are mentioned below with examples. Note that /phreu/ is used both as interrogative and indefinite pronoun.

/phreu/ or /phreu-san/ ‘anybody’

/kam-phrɔŋ/ ‘some’

/maŋ-kon/ ‘some other people’

/pen/ ‘others’

- (35) /pen hit kɔ mou
 others do person 2s
 bab nai hit/
 NEG this do
 ‘Even if others do, you cannot do this’

3.2.1.5 Case:

The case markers in Tai Ahom language have their independent meanings too. The case markers usually precede the noun or pronoun they are ascribed to. In Ahom, instrumental and locative case relations are marked by various prepositions. Nominative is generally not marked in Tai Ahom but /ne / and /de / are used sometimes. Genitive is never marked in the language. Following are the lists of the markers and their autonomous meanings.

Cases	Markers
Nominative	Nil (sometimes /ne / and /de / are used)
Objective	/ti, haŋ, mai, ca /
Instrumental	/ao, taŋ, lup /
Dative	/ti, haŋ, raŋ, mai /
Ablative	/luk /
Locative	/ti, ham /
Genitive	Nil

Table 3.3: Case in Tai Ahom.

The independent meanings these case markers ascribe are given below.

<i>ti</i>	'place', 'to stand'
<i>haŋ</i>	'to hate'
<i>mai</i>	'bamboo', 'widow'
<i>ca</i>	'rough', 'anger'
<i>ao</i>	'to take'
<i>taŋ</i>	'to cook', 'road'
<i>lup</i>	'to lean'
<i>luk</i>	'child', 'room'
<i>ham</i>	'conclusion'

Table 3.4: Independent meanings of case markers.

In other words, cases in Tai Ahom are grammaticalized versions of various words with independent meanings. Grammaticalization is considered as a productive construction⁴ allowing nouns and verbs with certain lexical meaning to develop into grammatical items like case markers as in Tai Ahom. In case of the Ahom language, the process of grammaticalization can be observed as a process of optimization (Kiparsky, 2005) through which new grammatical items can be developed out of lexical items with independent meaning. Examples are cited below.

3.2.1.5.1 Nominative case:

The marker of nominative case whenever used, occurs after the noun. For example,

(36) /*hu kiñ ja* /
 cow eat grass
 ‘Cows eat grass’

(37) /*hu ne kiñ blok u* /
 cow NOM eat flower CON
 ‘That cow is eating flowers’

3.2.1.5.2 Objective case:

The marker of objective is used before the noun (/pronoun) in case of imperative sentences. In case of a direct object, the marker is used after the noun (/pronoun). In sentences with two objects, the objective case marker can occur both before and after the indirect object. It is notable that the marker /*ti* / usually occurs before the noun whereas /*mai* / occurs after the noun. For example,

(38) /*ti kao hau ma ta* /
 OBJ Is give COME IMP
 ‘Give (it to) me’

⁴ Hopper and Traugott (2003) discuss the various processes of grammaticalization in detail.

- (39) /*haŋ kao hau tra sam an* /
 OBJ 1s give rupee three COUNT

'Give me three rupees'

- (40) /*kao mai ram han jao* /
 1s OBJ Ram see PST

'Ram saw me'

- (41) /*ti kao ram han jao* /
 OBJ 1s Ram see PST

'Ram saw me'

- (42) /*ti khao kao kə*
 OBJ 3p 1s also
tham kham koi
 ask matter PERF

'I also have asked them (about) the matter'

3.2.1.5.3 Instrumental case:

It is notable in case of the instrumental case markers in Ahom that /*ao* / and /*taŋ* / are used in terms of inanimate 'instruments' while /*luŋ* / is specifically used for animate ones. The instrumental case markers are used before the 'instrumental' noun. Examples are given below.

- (43) /*man ao khan pha phun* /
 3s INS axe tear apart firewood

'He is cutting firewood with an axe'

- (44) /*man kin khao taŋ klu* /
 3s eat rice INS salt

'He eats rice with salt'

- (45) /*man ma luj pɔ man* /
 3s come INS father 3s

'He has come with his father'

- (46) /*nu mai ao rɔk tai ta* /
 deer OBJ INS spear kill IMP

'Kill the deer with a spear'

- (47) /*man man mai ao mai pɔ ka* /
 3s 3s OBJ INS stick beat PST

'He beat him with a stick'

3.2.1.5.4 Dative case:

- (48) /*man raj kao hau* /
 3s DAT 1s give
than dun lai lej /
 carpet one

'He gave me a carpet'

- (49) /*man kon phan* /
 3s man poor
mai hau khao /
 DAT give paddy

'He gives paddy to poor people'

3.2.1.5.5 Ablative case:

- (50) /*man luk ti* /
 3s ABL place
ce huj ma /
 Gargaon come

'He has come from Gargaon'

- (51) */luk ti ce mun ka*
 ABL place Rangpur very much
ce doi bab kai /
 Charaideo NEG distance
 ‘It is not very far from Rangpur to Charaideo’

3.2.1.5.6 Locative case:

- (52) */mu kɔn cao-pha muɲ dun*
 ancient day HON-king Assam
ju ti ce mun /
 be LOC Rangpur
 ‘In ancient days, the Ahom kings were at Rangpur’

- (53) */muɲ dam jaŋ ti*
 maidam be LOC
 (tombs of the Ahom kings)
ti ce doi /
 LOC Charaideo
 ‘There are maidams⁵ at Charaideo’

3.2.1.5.7 Possessives:

Regarding genitive case or possessives, the relative word follows the noun. The order in genitive case is,

Possessed + Possessor

It is important to note that the order of the genitive and noun remains the same in both alienable and inalienable genitive constructions. Examples are given below.

⁵ Burial place for Ahom kings and royal families.

a) Alienable:

(54) /ren man/

house 3s

'His house'

(55) /lik mou/

book 2s

'Your book'

b) Inalienable:

(56) /luk man jaŋ si kə/

child 3s be four CL

'He has four children'

(57) /pi-nəŋ kao/

younger brother 1s

'My younger brother'

3.2.1.5.8 Vocative case:

With regard to vocative case, /ha/ is used in address. For example,

(58) /mè ha/

mother VOC

'O' mother'

(59) /lan-kham ha/

grand child-gold VOC

'O' grand children'

3.2.1.6 Preposition, conjunction and interjection:

Words denoting prepositions, conjunctions and interjections in Tai Ahom are mentioned below. The multi-functionality of words is prominent in these examples.

a) Prepositions:

/teu/ ‘under, below’

/neu/ ‘in, inside’

/nok/ ‘out, outside’

/ka/ ‘behind’

/kan na/ ‘in front of’

/kan laŋ/ ‘in the back of’

/kaŋ/ or */kheŋ kaŋ/* ‘in middle’

/taŋ/ or */luŋ/* ‘with’

/ao/ ‘by’

/ti/ ‘at’

Examples are,

(60) */kao ma ao leŋ koi/*
Is come by car PERF
‘I have come by car’

(61) */kao ma luŋ*
Is come with
mè rao koi/
mother 1p PERF
‘I have come with our mother’

(62) */ren rao ti ce mun/*
house 1p at Rangpur
‘Our house is at Rangpur’

- (63) /*kon nan tha*
 man that wait
ka nək u /
 outside CON
 ‘That man is waiting outside’

b) Conjunctions:

- /*sam*/ ‘but, and, then’
 /*khen sam*/ ‘again, if’
 /*ik*/ or /*ik taŋ*/ or /*kup taŋ*/ ‘in addition, with, and’
 /*lai nai*/ or /*pu nai*/ ‘for this reason’
 /*le*/ ‘and, if’
 /*pu caŋ*/ or /*lai caŋ*/ ‘why, for what reason’
 /*kə*/ ‘also’
 /*saŋ*/ or /*saŋ tak*/ ‘so, if’
 /*tə nai*/ or /*tə nai kə*/ ‘even then’

c) Interjections:

- /*uŋ*/ or /*huŋ*/ ‘hello’
 /*mè uŋ*/ ‘oh mother’
 /*se*/ or /*ce*/ or /*sim*/ ‘oh no! (Regret)’
 /*sik*/ ‘oh no! (Hatred)’
 /*ka*/ ‘uh! (Pain)’

3.2.2 Adjectival and adverbials:

3.2.2.1 Adjectives:

It is notable that the adjective in the Tai Ahom language always follows the noun it qualifies. For instance,

- (64) /*hu dej*/
 cow red

'red cow'

- (65) /*mleu nam* /
 cat black
 'black cat'

In some cases, words from different classes such as nouns or verbs can also act as adjectives. This is due to the multifunctional nature of Ahom words. For example,

- (66) /*caŋ then* /
 elephant forest
 'wild elephant'

- (67) /*mleu puŋ* /
 cat to stray
 'Tom cat'

- (68) /*eŋ nam* /
 to sit on knees water
 'water pot, pitcher'

- (69) /*nam eŋ* /
 water to sit on knees
 'pot water, water of the pitcher'

An interesting feature of the adjectives in Tai Ahom is that if a noun has more than one adjective, then the noun is repeated before each of the adjectives. For instance,

- (70) /*kao hañ tun suŋ tun* /
 ls see tree tall tree
leŋ ti nan ɣao /

yellow LOC there PST
 ‘I saw a tall yellow tree there’

Similarly, if an adjective qualifies more than one noun, it is repeated after each noun. For example,

(71) /*hu* *di* *khrai* *di*
 cow good buffalo good
 nam-nam *ək* *ti* *kat/*
 many-many come out LOC market
 ‘There is a good number of well-bred cattle out in the market’

It is remarkable from the above example that the Ahom language does not offer gapping, a grammatical operation by which some part of the sentence are omitted through coordination processes in order to avoid repetition. A good example of gapping can be easily found in English. Look at the following sentences.

- (a) John bought a mango and Mary *bought* an orange.
 (b) John bought a mango, and Mary an orange.

In sentence (a), the italicized second occurrence of *bought* can be omitted or gapped resulting in sentence (b). However, such deletion does not occur in Ahom. The above English sentences will have just one expression in Tai Ahom.

(72) /*jən* *su* *mak-maməŋ* *leŋ* *an*
 John buy CL-mango one and
 meri *su* *mak-ban* *leŋ* *jao/*
 Mary buy CL-orange one PST
 ‘John bought a mango and Mary bought an orange’

It is now apparent that the Ahom language does not include complex coordination processes like gapping. However, the language contains a number of coordinating conjunctions that have been cited earlier in section 3.2.1.6 of this chapter.

3.2.2.1.1 Comparison:

Comparison in Tai Ahom is made by using two words - /*kheɲ*/ ‘to be better’ and /*se*/ ‘than’ (comparative marker). The former word is positioned before the adjective whereas the other marker follows the adjective. The compared object follows the object with which comparison is made. For example,

- (73) /*ren nai di se ren nan u* /
 house this good COMP house that CON
 ‘This house is better than that house’

- (74) /*nam-muk an-nai kheɲ dam u* /
 ink this COMP black CON
 ‘This ink is blacker than others’

The superlative degree is indicated by adding words or phrases such as /*nam nam* /, /*taɲ mut* / and /*taɲ luɲ* / after /*kheɲ* / . Examples are given below.

- (75) /*nuŋ-kaʼ kheɲ dam taɲ luɲ* /
 CL-crow COMP black SUP
 ‘Crow is the most black (of all birds)’

- (76) /*man la kha baɲ mai kheɲ di taɲ mut* /
 3s be boy village OBJ COMP good SUP
 ‘He is the best among all village boys’

- (77) /*ho luɲ cao-pha kheɲ di nam nam* /
 palace great HON-Pha COMP good SUP
 ‘The great palace of Sir Pha is the best of them all’

3.2.2.2 Adverbs:

The adverbs in Tai Ahom language usually occur in the middle or end of the sentence, especially in Subject-prominent sentences. In case of sentences without a prominent Subject or no Subject at all, adverbs occur in the beginning of the sentence. Sometimes the adverbs are reduplicated - for example, the adverbs of manner. The various types of adverbs are briefly discussed below with examples.

3.2.2.2.1 Adverbs of manner:

As mentioned above, the adverbs of manner in Tai Ahom language are usually reduplicated. For example, /*nan nan* / 'steadily'; /*lai lai* / 'slowly'; /*khan khan* / or /*kai kai* / 'quickly'; /*cam cam* / 'early'; /*di di* / 'well'; /*ŋam ŋam* / 'fine'; /*cip cip* / 'silently'; /*jin jin* / 'calmly'; etc. Examples of manner adverbs in Tai Ahom are mentioned below.

(78) /*kin lai lai* /

eat slowly

'Eat slowly'

(79) /*paĩ kai kai* /

go quickly

'Go quickly'

(80) /*ma nai lep kai kai* /

horse this run quickly

'This horse runs quickly'

(81) /*pai hai ju jin jin* /

NEG shout stay calmly

'Do not shout, stay calmly'

- (82) /luk hit di di /
 child do well
 'The child has done well'

As noticed from the examples above, **manner adverbs** in Ahom usually function as a) complements and b) modifiers of verbs. Note that manner adverbs occur in post-verbal position in a single clause, generally in the sentence-final position. In case of manner adverbs, the scope of adverbs is always the verb or the verb phrase (VP).

3.2.2.2.2 Adverbs of time:

The adverbs of time in Tai Ahom language generally occur in the beginning of the sentence. Some of the adverbs of time are cited below with examples - /caŋ nai / 'now'; /mu nai / 'today'; /mu ŋa / 'yesterday'; /mu thuk / 'tomorrow'; /mu nan / 'at that time'; /neu sai / 'morning'; /bun / 'noon'; /ten len / 'afterwards'; etc.

- (83) /mu ŋa rao kin nu pet /
 yesterday 1p eat meat duck
 'Yesterday we had duck meat'

- (84) /mu nai kao tak paĩ han-ce-ra /
 today 1s FUT go Hahchara
 'Today I will go to Hahchara'

As noticed in the examples, the adverbs of time occur in sentence-initial position in Tai Ahom. The scope of such adverbs is the whole sentence.

3.2.2.2.3 Adverbs of place:

The adverbs of place can be used in beginning, middle or end of the sentence depending on their roles in the sentence. They are mentioned below - /keu / or /ti keu / 'near'; /kai / or /ti kai / 'distant'; /thai / or /ti thai / 'here'; /than / or /ti than / 'there'; /theu / or /ti theu / or /ti neu / or /tan neu / or /ti leu / 'where'; /theu ɔ / or

/ti theu ɔ/ ‘at any place, anywhere’; etc.

(85) */mou luk ti leu ma/*
 2s ABL where come
 ‘Where are you coming from?’

(86) */ka nɔk phun tuk si u/*
 outside rain fall NF CON
 ‘It is raining outside’

3.2.2.2.4 Adverbs of frequency:

Same follows with the adverbs of frequency too. They can occur anywhere in the beginning, middle or end of the sentence. The adverbs of frequency in Tai Ahom are for example: */pɔk leŋ/* or */pan leŋ/* ‘once’; */sɔŋ pɔk/* or */sɔŋ pan/* ‘twice’; */kip kip/* ‘frequently’; */naŋ kao/* ‘like previous time, again’; */ku mu ku ban/* ‘always, daily’; */mu neu kai/* ‘occasionally’; etc.

(87) */ku mu ku ban ap nam ta/*
 everyday bathe water IMP
 ‘Bathe everyday’

3.2.2.2.5 Adverbs of degree:

The adverbs of degree in Tai Ahom language are given below.

/cɔn leŋ/ or */ceŋ leŋ/* ‘a little’

/nam nam/ or */nam luŋ/* ‘much’

/phiu/ or */nam phiu/* ‘very much’

/nam nam lai lai/ ‘in great quantity’

/kha leu/ ‘how much, how many’

/kha lai/ ‘this much’

/kha lan/ ‘that much’

/ki/ ‘what quantity’

It is notable that adverbs in Tai Ahom usually do not change their position in the sentence. Moreover, the scope of the adverbs does not change.

3.2.3 Numerals and classifiers:

3.2.3.1 Numerals:

The numerical system of Tai Ahom language follows unary numeral system (from 1 to 9), and it does not have a symbol for ‘zero’. It is notable that every natural number in Tai Ahom is represented by a corresponding number of symbols. However, there are few numbers without symbols in its numeral system. For instance, the Ahom numeral system does not have symbols for the digits 3, 4 and 5. In other words, the numeral system of Tai Ahom can be represented as a bijective numeration system as there is no explicit symbol representing ‘zero’. More specifically, it is a bijective base-10 system; it is a base ten positional numeral system which does not use a digit to represent zero, instead, it features a digit ‘*loi*’ to represent ‘ten’. The Ahom numeral system follows addition system. The symbols of the natural numbers in Tai Ahom are given below:

𑜀 1, 𑜁 2, 𑜂 𑜂 3, 𑜃 𑜃 4, 𑜄 𑜄 𑜄 5, 𑜅 𑜅 𑜅 6, 𑜆 𑜆 𑜆 7, 𑜇 𑜇 𑜇 8, 𑜈 𑜈 𑜈 9, 𑜉 𑜉 10

3.2.3.1.1 Cardinals:

Following are the cardinal numbers in Tai Ahom.

<i>/leŋ/</i> ‘one’	<i>/səŋ/</i> ‘two’
<i>/sam/</i> ‘three’	<i>/si/</i> ‘four’
<i>/ha/</i> ‘five’	<i>/ruk/</i> or <i>/huk/</i> ‘six’
<i>/sit/</i> ‘seven’	<i>/pet/</i> ‘eight’
<i>/kao/</i> ‘nine’	<i>/sip/</i> ‘ten’
<i>/sip it/</i> ‘eleven’	<i>/sip səŋ/</i> ‘twelve’
<i>/sip sam/</i> ‘thirteen’	<i>/sip si/</i> ‘fourteen’
<i>/sip ha/</i> ‘fifteen’	<i>/sao/</i> ‘twenty’

/sao it/ 'twenty one'	/sao sɔŋ/ 'twenty two'
/sao sam/ 'twenty three'	/sam sip/ 'thirty'
/sam sip it/ 'thirty one'	/sam sip sam/ 'thirty three'
/si sip/ 'forty'	/ha sip/ 'fifty'
/pet sip/ 'eighty'	/kao sip/ 'ninety'
/pak/ or /pak leŋ/ 'one hundred'	/pak pai leŋ/ 'one hundred and one'
/pak pai sam/ 'one hundred and three'	/pak pai sam sip sam/ 'one hundred thirty three'
/sɔŋ pak pai leŋ/ 'two hundred one'	/sɔŋ pak pai sɔŋ/ 'two hundred two'
/sɔŋ pak pai sɔŋ sip sɔŋ/ 'two hundred thirty two'	/sam pak/ 'three hundred'
/si pak/ 'four hundred'	/riŋ leŋ/ or /hiŋ leŋ/ 'thousand'
/riŋ pai ha/ 'one thousand and five'	/riŋ pai sam sip sam/ 'one thousand thirty three'
/sam riŋ sam pak sam sip sam / 'three thousand three hundred thirty three'	/mun leŋ/ 'ten thousand'
/sep leŋ/ 'one lakh'	/lan leŋ/ 'ten lakh'
/kuk ti leŋ/ 'one crore'	

Table 3.5: Cardinals in Tai Ahom.

3.2.3.1.2 Ordinals:

To mean the order of place in Tai Ahom language, the word /ti/ is added before the numerals. The ordinals are given below.

/ti leŋ/ 'first'	/ti sɔŋ/ 'second'
/ti sam/ 'third'	/ti si/ 'fourth'
/ti ha/ 'fifth'	/ti huk/ 'sixth'
/ti sit/ 'seventh'	/ti pit/ 'eighth'
/ti kao/ 'ninth'	/ti sip/ 'tenth'

Table 3.6: Ordinals in Tai Ahom.

3.2.3.1.3 Fractionals:

Some of the fractions used in Tai Ahom language are cited below.

/leŋ taŋ sam / '1/3'

/sam taŋ si / '3/4'

/ha taŋ ruk / '5/6'

/sip taŋ pak / '10/1000'

3.2.3.1.4 Enumeratives or proportionals:

/pək / or */pan /* is added with the numerals in order to denote number of times.

In case of the numeral 'one', the enumerative marker precedes the numeral. Whereas, it follows numerals other than 'one'. The enumeratives used in Tai Ahom language are the following.

/pək leŋ / or */pan leŋ /* 'once'

/səŋ pək / 'twice'

/sip pək / 'ten times'

/pak pək / 'hundred times'

/riŋ pan / 'thousand times'

3.2.3.1.5 Distributive numerals:

Regarding addition, subtraction, etc. in Tai Ahom language, the following words are used.

/pəŋ / or */pəŋ kan /* 'added to'

/tip / or */tip kan /* 'subtracted from'

/mək / or */mək kan /* 'multiplied by'

/kin / or */kin kan /* 'divided by'

3.2.3.2 Classifiers:

Tai Ahom language is rich in classifiers. The language uses a wide range of

noun classifiers. Classifiers in Tai Ahom are used to categorize nouns in terms of different features including animacy, form, shape, size, etc. The classifier either precedes or follows the noun in case of singular number. Whereas with plural numbers, it generally comes at the end when a numeral is added. Examples are given below. The orders of words are the following.

For singular numbers:

- a) CL + Noun
- b) Noun + CL

For plural numbers:

- a) Noun + Numeral + CL
- b) Noun + CL + Numeral
- c) Numeral + CL + Noun

/ku/ 'pair' (when the shape and size are equal)

- (88) */ku kej-ru/*
CL earring
'a pair of ear-rings'

/kup/ 'pair' (when the shape and size may not be equal)

- (89) */blok-na ha kup/*
flower five CL
'five pairs of flowers'

/paŋ/ 'pair' (used for pair of plough bullocks)

- (90) */hu sam paŋ/*
cow three CL
'three pairs of cows'

/tu/ applicable to animals

- (91) /*saŋ-me tu/*
elephant-FG CL
'the female elephant'

/nuŋ/ 'birds'

- (92) /*nuŋ pet/*
CL duck
'the duck'

/kon/ applicable to man

- (93) /*kon sɔŋ kon/*
man two CL
'two men'

/puk/ 'big bundle'

- (94) /*puk pha/*
CL cloth
'a big bundle of clothes'

/pan/ 'small bundle'

- (95) /*pan khao/*
CL paddy
'a small bundle of paddy'

/nim/ 'sheaf' (as of paddy)

- (96) /*nim khao/*
CL paddy
'a sheaf of paddy'

/khot/ ‘small packet or bundle with tied knot’

(97) */khot phak/*

CL spinach

‘a small tied bundle of spinach’

/ho/ ‘small packet or bundle with un-tied knot’

(98) */ho khao/*

CL rice

‘a small packet of rice/curry’

/huj/ ‘round shaped fruit or article’

(99) */huj ban/*

CL bowl

‘a bowl’

/mit/ ‘very small seed or particle’

(100) */mit phun/*

CL rain

‘a particle of rain, raindrop’

/mou/ ‘a leaf or an article that is thin like a leaf’

(101) */toŋ mou leŋ/*

leaf CL one

‘one leaf’

(102) */dap sam mou/*

sword three CL

‘three swords’

/tun/ ‘standing tree with leaves and branches’

(103) */tun kuj/*

CL banana
'a banana tree'

/tɔn/ 'a big or small piece'

(104) */mai-san sɔŋ tɔn/*
bamboo two CL
'two pieces of bamboo'

/khɔn/ 'very big bundle'

(105) */phun sɔŋ khɔn/*
firewood two CL
'two big bundles of firewood'

/lim/ 'long, thin and hard article'

(106) */rək sam lim/*
spear three CL
'three spears'

/seŋ/ 'very small long slender article like hair, thread of yarn'

(107) */seŋ phrum/*
CL hair
'a hair'

/sai/ 'strand, small thread like garland, necklace'

(108) */pɔŋ kham sai leŋ/*
bead gold CL one
'a string of golden necklace'

/khɔ/ 'paragraph'

(109) */khɔm khɔ ha/*
subject-matter CL five

'the fifth paragraph of the subject'

/kam/ 'unit of words'

- (110) */khom kam leŋ/*
 subject-matter CL one
 'a unit of words, discourse'

/han/ or */ran/* 'stories, floors'

In the Ahom language, */h/* and */r/* are freely interchangeable when occurring in the initial position of a word⁶. The interchangeability of these initial consonants occurs with all the front and back vowel except */o/*. For example,

- (111) */thin ruŋ kham kao ran/*
 throne glitter gold nine CL
 'the glittering nine-storied golden throne'

/həŋ/ or */rəŋ/* 'room in a house'

- (112) */ren si rəŋ/*
 house four CL
 'four-room house'

/laŋ/ 'house, roof of a house'

- (113) */si laŋ ren/*
 four CL house
 'four houses'

/ip/ 'a tin casket'

- (114) */ip thun/*
 CL lime
 'a vessel containing lime'

⁶ Interchangeability of consonants is discussed in chapter 2.

Following is a list of classifiers in Ahom language along with their semantic meanings as well as positions in sentence. It is notable that the classifier in Ahom language usually occurs either before or after the noun it qualifies.

Classifier	Semantic meaning	Position in sentence
<i>ku</i>	pair (when the shape and size are equal)	Before the qualifying noun
<i>kup</i>	pair (when the shape and size may not be equal)	After the qualifying noun
<i>paŋ</i>	pair (used for pair of plough bullocks)	-do-
<i>tu</i>	Animal	-do-
<i>nuk</i>	Bird	Before the qualifying noun
<i>kon</i>	Man	-do-
<i>puk</i>	Big bundle	Before the qualifying noun
<i>pan</i>	Small bundle	-do-
<i>nim</i>	Sheaf or bunch	-do-
<i>khət</i>	Small packet or bundle with tied knot	-do-
<i>hə</i>	Small packet or bundle with un-tied knot	-do-
<i>hup</i>	Round shaped fruit or article	-do-
<i>mit</i>	Very small seed or particle	-do-
<i>mou</i>	A leaf or an article that is thin like a leaf	After the qualifying noun
<i>tun</i>	Standing tree with leaves and branches	Before the qualifying noun
<i>tən</i>	A big or small piece	After the qualifying noun
<i>khən</i>	Very big bundle	-do-
<i>lim</i>	Long, thin and hard article	-do-
<i>seŋ</i>	Very small long slender article like hair, thread of yarn	Before the qualifying noun
<i>sai</i>	Strand, small thread like garland, necklace	After the qualifying noun
<i>khə</i>	Paragraph	-do-
<i>kam</i>	Unit of words	-do-
<i>han or ran</i>	Stories, floors	-do-

<i>hɔŋ or rɔŋ</i>	Room in a house.	-do-
<i>laŋ</i>	House, roof of a house	Before the qualifying noun
<i>ip</i>	A tin casket	-do-

Table 3.7: *Classifiers in Tai Ahom.*

3.2.4 Verb morphology:

3.2.4.1 Verb forms:

In Tai Ahom, verbs never change either in number, tense or voice. Instead, different multifunctional words (hence, different markers) are added before or after the verb to indicate different tenses.

3.2.4.1.1 Non-finite verbs:

There are various markers to denote a non-finite action in Tai Ahom language such as, /*si*, *dai*, *pɔ*, *ti*/. It is notable that these markers are not allomorphs. They are different words signifying their own independent meanings apart from being markers of non-finite verbs. The markers are cited below with examples.

Markers	Meanings
/si/	'to break', 'four', 'to fill'
/dai/	'to hear', 'thread', 'to get'
/pɔ/	'to say', 'to beat', 'father'
/ti/	'place', 'to stand'

Table 3.8: *Independent meanings of non-finite markers in Tai Ahom.*

a) Conjunctive participles:

The conjunctive participle (CP) in Tai Ahom is marked by /*si* / and /*dai* /, which are added after the verb expressing adverbial subordination. While the former is usually follows the participle verb, the latter can either precede or follow it. Unlike the CP in IA languages (for instance, /*kər* / 'to do' in Hindi), the Ahom CP is not affixed to the participle verb. But it does occur after the participle verb just like the Hindi /*kər*/. Examples are given below.

Hindi⁷

- (115) /*us-ne əxba:r pəʃ^h-kəʀ ciʃʃ^hi: likh-i:/*
 3s-ERG newspaper read-CP letter write-FG+PST
 ‘He wrote a letter after reading the newspaper’

- (116) /*pita-ji khana kha-kəʀ so gəye/*
 father-HON food eat-CP sleep GO+3s+MG+HON+PST
 ‘Having eaten his meals, father went off to sleep’

Ahom

- (117) /*man kiŋ^h khao ʃao si tak kã /*
 3s eat rice PST CP FUT go
 ‘He will go after having eaten rice’

- (118) /*run dai kə luk-ŋeŋ pə man si sit ʃao /*
 cry hear PST child-FG father CP anger PST
 ‘The father got angry after hearing (his) daughter cry’

- (119) /*ʃən si klu tok-leŋ dai ɔ /*
 ask CP salt CL-one get PERF
 ‘(I) have got a bundle of salt after asking (for it)’

- (120) /*bañ tuk si kəi man kã ʃao /*
 sun fall CP PERF 3s go PST
 ‘He went after the falling of the sun (sunset)’

To turn it into a finite sentence, conjunction words are infixed between the two parts of activities. For example, the above sentence will be expressed in a way cited below after deleting the CP marker.

⁷ Sources: Koul (2008) and Abbi (2001), respectively.

- (121) /*baɪ̃ tuk sam man kǎ̃ jao* /
 sun fall and 3s go PST
 ‘The sun set down and he went’

The non-finite CP marker /*dai*/ is added either before or after the participle verb. For example,

- (122) /*khəm dai ɲin kon-phu run jao* /
 news CP hear man-MG cry PST
 ‘The man cried after hearing the news’

- (123) /*man ma dai ɔ kao kǎ̃ jao* /
 3s come CP PERF 1s go PST
 ‘I went after his coming’

/*dai*/ is also an infinitive marker used before the verb in case the infinitive is nominalized. For example,

- (124) /*dai phuk lɔɲ kheɲ mou jao* /
 INF learn swim save 2s PST
 ‘Your learning to swim saved you’

A finite alternative for the above example will be as the following. Note that the non-finite CP marker is dropped here.

- (125) /*man ma le kao kǎ̃ jao* /
 3s come and 1s go PST
 ‘He came and (then) I went’

b) Non-finite /*pɔ*/

It is added after the participle verb. For example,

- (126) /*kao hañ mou tai pɔ ŋu* /
 1s see 2s kill NF snake
 ‘I saw you killing the snake’

c) Infinitive /ti/

This is the infinitive marker in Tai Ahom language. It precedes the verb. The same marker is also used as the marker of non-finite verb. As a non-finite marker, it follows the verb. For example,

- (127) /*ti kin̄ khao ɟɔn klu* /
 INF eat rice ask salt
 ‘(He) asked for salt to eat rice’

- (128) /*kon mi mak kɔ ceu-man-ket ti khao*
 man also rich CL keep in mind NF paddy
nan tai ka pin nuk kai-nam /
 that die GO become CL water-hen
 ‘Keeping in mind about that paddy, the rich man also died to become a water hen’

In short, Tai Ahom features two conjunctive participles (/si/ and dai/) along with /pɔ/ and /ti/ as its other non-finite verb forms. The NF markers in Tai Ahom are perfective in nature, that is, they represent completed verbal activity. The conjunctive participles, in particular, function as adverbial clauses and are used to express an act that precedes the main clause act.

3.2.4.1.2 Auxiliary verb:

The auxiliary or ‘be’ verb in Tai Ahom is /ju/ or /jaŋ/ usually added in the middle of the sentence. However, its occurrence is optional. For example,

- (129) /*tun-ruŋ tun ju klaŋ na kɔi* /

CL-peepul tree be middle field PERF
 'The peepul tree is in the middle of the field'

3.2.4.1.3 Modal verbs:

a) /dai/

In order to mean potentiality or ability, /dai/ is used after the verb. For example,

(130) /*man phək dai khəm tai* /
 3s speak can language Tai
 'He can speak Tai language'

(131) /*kon rao puk doi bao dai koi* /
 man 1p climb mountain NEG can PERF
 'Our men could not climb the mountain'

b) /pin/

/pin/ is used to indicate possible circumstances. It occurs before the verb. For example,

(132) /*ban nai pin ra ti khen* /
 today may rain heavily at night
 'It may rain heavily tonight'

(133) /*mu thuk man-cao pin ju ti ti phau* /
 tomorrow 3s-HON may stay LOC Dibrugarh
 'Maybe he will stay in Dibrugarh tomorrow'

c) /ti dai/

To signify the sense of responsibility, /ti dai/ is added before the verb. For example,

- (134) /*man-naŋ kǎ kɔi ti dai taŋ khao* /
 3s-FG go PERF should cook rice
 ‘She has gone; (now we) should cook rice’

The same phrase (/ *ti dai* /) can also be used to mean the probable completion of an action, occurring before the verb. For example,

- (135) /*tan man mai kao ti dai hañ* /
 somewhere 3s OBJ 1s must have see
 ‘Somewhere he must have **been seen** by me’ or
 ‘I must have seen him somewhere’

- (136) /*phu-ŋeŋ ti dai rai si kɔi* /
 man-FG must have die BREAK PERF
 ‘The woman must have died’

d) /*ɲa* /

/*ɲa* / is the marker for denoting habitual aspect in Tai Ahom language. It occurs before the verb. For example,

- (137) /*kon muŋ dun ɲa kiñ khao* /
 man Assam HAB eat rice
 ‘People of Assam generally eat rice’

- (138) /*ti ren kon tai-khamti*
 at house man Tai-Khamti
ɲa khan khom-tai /
 HAB speak Tai language
 ‘Tai-Khamti people speak the Tai language at their homes’

e) /la/

/la/ occurs before the verb in order to denote an action being forced by situations. For example,

- (139) /saj̃ bao dai khao mou la kiñ khao si /
 if NEG get rice 2s have to eat dried rice
 ‘If (you) don’t get rice, you will have to eat dried rice’

- (140) /seu phaj̃ bao pe dai la pik pai jao /
 army a Muslim man NEG win can have to retreat PST
 ‘The Mughal army had to retreat (when they) could not win’

f) /ɔi/

In order to denote the continuation of an action, /ɔi/ is used after the verb usually at the end of the sentence. For example,

- (141) /mou dai naj̃ ba kao t̃em ɔi /
 2s NF sit say 1s write CON
 ‘You say (it) after sitting (comfortably), (then) I will keep on writing’

- (142) /kon nam nam tuk k̃oi to lak seu to ɔi /
 man many fall PERF yet army fight CON
 ‘Many men fell down, yet the army kept on fighting’

g) /kan/

/kan/ is added after the verb in order to mean the beginning of an action. For example,

- (143) /saj̃ tak naj̃ rumsej̃ e kan /
 so HON+FG Rumseng sing begin
 ‘So Miss Rumseng started singing’

- (144) /*phreu nai seu phaŋ khit ma kon*
 when army a Muslim chase COME man
rao khao kan-phan kan khroi jao/
 1p 3p cut begin destroy PST
 ‘When the Mughal army came chasing, our men started tearing them down’

h) /*thuk*/

In order to signify an appropriate behavior or action, /*thuk*/ is used before the verb. For example,

- (145) /*kon thao mai thuk nok*/
 man old OBJ should respect
 ‘Elderly men should be respected’

- (146) /*mou bao thuk klin nam thum*/
 2s NEG should drink curd
 ‘You should not have had curd’

Following is a table of the modal verbs in Tai Ahom along with their nature of modality.

Nature of modality	Modal verbs
Physical or intellectual capacity, prohibition	/ <i>dai</i> /
Possibility/uncertainty	/ <i>pin</i> /
Suggestions or recommendations, probability	/ <i>ti dai</i> /
Personal habits	/ <i>pa</i> /
Obligation/necessity	/ <i>la</i> /
Obligation/continuity	/ <i>oi</i> /
Obligation/start of action	/ <i>kan</i> /

Moral obligation, general or particular advice	/thuk/
--	--------

Table 3.9: *Modal verbs in Tai Ahom.*

3.2.4.1.4 Explicator compound verbs:

Explicator compound verb or ECV constructions are not a regular phenomenon in Tai Ahom language. But it is very much used by the speakers. The explicator or the secondary verb does not change the meaning but it simply explicates as the name says it all. The sequence of V1 and V2 in an ECV construction in Tai Ahom is such that the explicator or V2 can either precede or follow V1 or the main verb. So,

V1 + V2 or V2 + V1

Both are allowed in Ahom. The nature of the ECV in Tai Ahom is aspectual. The basic semantic function of the ECV construction here is ‘perfectivity’ or action being seen as a whole or completion. In most of the cases, action verbs (including ‘walk’, ‘arrive’, ‘break’, ‘take’) are used in forming ECV construction in Tai Ahom that indicate perfectivity. However, some exceptions are also present. Consider the example of the action verb ‘go’, which does not mean perfectivity but signifying continuity (or imperfectivity). Similarly, ‘stay’ also indicates continuity. Some of the explicator verbs⁸ in Tai Ahom are cited below with examples.

/le/ ‘walk’

- (147) /ma-tu tai le/
 dog-CL kill WALK
 ‘The dog has been killed’

/kã/ ‘go’

- (148) /luk-nej jun kã u/
 child-FG run GO CON
 ‘The girl keeps on running’

⁸ All the explicator verbs or V2s are written in capital letters throughout the thesis.

/they/ 'arrive'

- (149) /*khaŋ na man ma they mou kã jao-ɔ/*
 before 3s come ARRIVE 2s go PST-PERF
 'You had gone before he came'

/ju/ 'stay'

- (150) /*khaŋ na bun rao ju tha mu thuk ti-u-kɔi/*
 before noon 1p STAY wait tomorrow FUT-CON-PERF
 'We will be waiting from before noon tomorrow'

/si/ 'break'

- (151) /*phu-ŋeŋ ti dai rai si kɔi/*
 man-FG must have die BREAK PERF
 'The woman must have died'

/ao/ 'take'

- (152) /*ao dai khroi-tu man kã ti ren kɔi/*
 TAKE get buffalo-CL 3s go LOC house PERF
 'He has gone home after having found the buffalo'

3.2.4.2 Tense, aspect and mood:

3.2.4.2.1 Tense:

Tai Ahom language identifies action through three tenses - past, present and future. They are discussed in details below.

3.2.4.2.1.1 Present tense:

Present tense in Tai Ahom mainly shows two types -

- a) Present indefinite
- b) Present continuous

Usually, no marker is used to indicate present indefinite tense in a sentence. Please note that the word order in most of the cases is SVO.⁹ For example,

(153) /*kao kiñ khao*/

1s eat rice

‘I eat rice’

(154) /*man nɔn*/

3s sleep

‘S/he sleeps’

(155) /*man kã ti kat*/

3s go LOC market

‘S/he goes to the market’

In case of forming present continuous tense, /*u*/ is added after the main verb. It is the marker of continuity aspect, which is also common in other two tenses. However, it sometimes functions as a marker of simple present tense too. The non-finite marker /*si*/ is added after the participial verb. Examples are given below.

(156) /*man kiñ khao si u*/

3s eat rice NF CON

‘S/he is eating rice’

(157) /*man nɔn si u*/

3s sleep NF CON

‘S/he is sleeping’

⁹ Details of word order in Tai Ahom are discussed in the 4th chapter.

- (158) /*luk-ɲeŋ jun kã si u* /
 child-FG run GO NF CON
 ‘The girl keeps on running’

3.2.4.2.1.2 Past tense:

Past tense in Tai Ahom is also divided mainly into two types -

- a) Past indefinite
- b) Past continuous

Marker indicating past indefinite is /*jao* /. However, perfective aspect markers also indicate simple past. These markers are - /*kɔ, ɔ, si, ka* /. The markers are added after the main verb, usually at the end of the sentence. For example,

- (159) /*man kiñ khao ɔ* /
 3s eat rice PERF
 ‘S/he ate food’

- (160) /*luk-nan-phu rai si* /
 child-that-CL die PERF
 ‘That child died’

- (161) /*cao-luŋkham ma jao* /
 HON-Luŋkham come PST
 ‘Sir Luŋkham came’

Regarding past continuous aspect, /*u jao* / is added after the main verb. Examples are,

- (162) /*mu nai mu ŋa luk-ɲeŋ lin u-jao* /
 time this yesterday child-FG play CON-PST

‘The girl was playing at this time yesterday’

(163)	<i>/mu</i>	<i>man</i>	<i>ma</i>	<i>ne</i>
	time	3s	come	NOM
	<i>kaō</i>	<i>nōn</i>	<i>si</i>	<i>u-kōi/</i>
	1s	sleep	NF	CON-PERF

‘At the time of his coming, I was sleeping’

3.2.4.2.1.3 Future tense:

There are two types of future tense found in Tai Ahom -

- Simple future
- Future continuous

The important aspect about future tense in Tai Ahom language is that unlike present and past tense markers, future tense markers have the option to either precede or follow the main verb. Markers denoting future tense are - */ti/* and */tak/*. They are added before the main verb. Examples are given below.

(164)	<i>/khōm</i>	<i>saŋ</i>	<i>pu</i>	<i>tak</i>	<i>lao/</i>
	advice	know	grand father	FUT	say

‘Grandfather will speak of his advice’

Regarding the formation of future continuous tense, the future tense marker */tak/* and the marker of continuity aspect */u/* are combined together. The future tense marker is added before the main verb while the continuity aspect follows the main verb. The order follows as this.

/tak/ + (main verb) + /u/

Examples of future continuous tense are given below.

- (165) /*mu nai mu thuk luk-sai tak lin u* /
 time this tomorrow child-MG FUT play CON
 ‘Tomorrow by this time the child will be playing’

Other aspects of tense are usually not so frequent in the Tai Ahom language but their occurrence cannot be disproved. Examples are cited in the following.

3.2.4.2.2 Aspect:

3.2.4.2.2.1 Present perfect:

/kɔi/ is the perfective aspect marker in Tai Ahom language. Note that it is used only in present and future tenses but not in past perfect. Another marker for perfective aspect is /dai/.¹⁰ Examples of present perfect tense are given below.

- (166) /*man kha phan mu-tu kɔi* /
 3s cut pig-CL PERF
 ‘He has cut the pig into slices’

- (167) /*man saŋ-tu hañ bao dai* /
 3s elephant-CL see NEG PERF
 ‘He hasn’t seen the elephant’

3.2.4.2.2.2 Past perfect:

Regarding past perfect tense, the perfective aspect marker is used along with the past tense marker. To mark past perfect, /jao ɔ/, /jao si/ or /si jao/ are added after the main verb, generally at the end of the sentence. Examples are.

- (168) /*khaŋ na man ma theŋ mou kã jao-ɔ* /
 before 3s come ARRIVE 2s go PST-PERF PERF
 ‘You had gone before he came’

¹⁰ Look in the section of modal verbs discussed earlier (section 3.2.4.1.3).

- (169) */bañ nan phreu nai mou*
 day that when 2s
 ma ti nan nan ran kan plañ kan si-jao /
 come there consult secretly PERF-PST
 ‘That day when you came there, the discussion was already over’

A rather unusual occurrence in the language is */u-kɔi-jao /* - the combination of the markers of continuity (*/u /*) and perfective (*/kɔi /*) aspects that are added with the past tense marker (*/jao /*). This marker occurs after the main verb, usually at the end of the sentence. Example is given below.

- (170) */mu sun luk neu sai*
 day before yesterday ABL morning
 phã ne ca u-kɔi-jao /
 weather bad CON-PERF-PST
 ‘The weather had been bad since the morning from day before yesterday’

3.2.4.2.2.3 Future perfect:

The makers of future tense (*/ti /*) and perfective aspect (*/kɔi /*) are added after the main verb generally occurring at the end of the sentence. Examples are below.

- (171) */khañ na mou ma thej*
 before 2s come ARRIVE
 kao tip mai ti-kɔi /
 Is cut bamboo FUT-PERF
 ‘I will have cut the bamboo before you come’

The understanding of tense and aspect in Tai Ahom language is usually perceived through the context or the use of words denoting a sense of time. Therefore, the tense markers except present perfect are not frequently used in the language. Besides, it makes the sentences shorter and hence easily comprehensible. For

example,

(172)	<i>/bañ</i>	<i>nan</i>	<i>taŋ</i>	<i>ai-seŋ</i>	<i>kā</i>	<i>ti</i>
	day	that	INS	Aiseng	go	LOC
	<i>nan</i>	<i>sam</i>	<i>baŋ</i>	<i>cu</i>	<i>ŋi ŋen</i>	<i>man</i>
	there	but	NEG	meet	Ngi Ngen	3s
	<i>sam</i>	<i>kā</i>	<i>ti</i>	<i>guahati</i>	<i>rao</i>	<i>pək</i>
	and	go	LOC	Guwahati	1p	return
	<i>ma</i>	<i>le</i>	<i>ju</i>	<i>ti</i>	<i>ren</i>	<i>pu nai /</i>
	come	and	stay	LOC	house	grandfather

‘That day (we) went there with Aiseng but didn’t meet Ngi Ngen; he had gone to Guwahati; we returned and stayed at grandfather’s house’

In the above example of conversation, there is not a single tense or aspect marker used. It is noteworthy that the aspect of time or tense can be identified here through the use of the phrase */bañ nan /* ‘that day’. Thus, tense markers are not compulsory in Tai Ahom language, especially in a conversation or discourse.

3.2.4.2.3 Mood:

The Tai Ahom language is full of markers indicating various moods and aspects such as conditional, subjunctive and imperative moods. They are briefly discussed below.

3.2.4.2.3.1 Conditional and subjunctive moods:

There are conditional and subjunctive aspects that are marked in Tai Ahom language. Regarding past conditional aspect, the markers of continuity aspect and future tense (*/u ti /*) are added before the verb whereas the past tense marker (*/jao /*) follows the main verb. For example,

(173)	<i>/kao</i>	<i>u-ti</i>	<i>kiñ</i>	<i>khao</i>	<i>jao /</i>
	1s	CON-FUT	eat	rice	PST

‘I would have eaten rice’

The probabilistic aspect in future tense is formed with /*u ti*/ preceding the main verb while the perfective mood /*kɔi*/ following it. Examples are given below.

- (174) /*man u-ti baɔ kã kɔi* /
 3s CON-FUT NEG go PERF
 ‘Maybe he would not have gone’

In a subjunctive verb construction (if...then), the phrase /*saj...sam*/ is used. Usually /*saj*/ precedes the sentence whereas /*sam*/ follows the subjunctive verb. Sometimes only /*saj*/ is used in a sentence and it follows the subjunctive verb. For example,

- (175) /*saj man ma ka sam kao kɔ tak kã* /
 if 3s come PERF then 1s also FUT go
 ‘If he comes, then I will also go’

- (176) /*man ma ka saj lej nai tak ao kã* /
 3s come PERF if car this FUT take GO
 ‘If he comes, then this car will be taken’

For possibility or in a doubtful sense, /*saj*/ ‘may/might’ is added before the main verb. For example,

- (177) /*man saj ma u* /
 3s may come CON
 ‘He may be coming’

- (178) /*kao saj bab kã u* /
 1s may NEG go CON
 ‘I may not be going’

3.2.4.2.3.2 Imperative mood:

Imperative mood in Tai Ahom language is represented by the markers /*ta* /, /*la* / and /*na* /. The markers are added after the verb. /*la* / and /*na* / are also the request markers of the language. Examples are given below.

ta (in general use)

(179) /*kã* *ta* /
 go IMP
 ‘Go’

la (in request)

(180) /*kã* *la* /
 go IMP+REQ
 ‘Please go’

na (in request, seeking or giving permission)

(181) /*kao* *kã* *na* /
 1s go IMP+REQ
 ‘(Please permit me) I go’

(182) /*mou* *kã* *na* /
 2s go IMP+REQ
 ‘(I let you) go’

(183) /*mou* *ma* *na* /
 2s come IMP+REQ
 ‘(I request you) please come’

It is notable that the imperative mood in Tai Ahom can be expressed even without a marker provided that it is addressed to inferior.

3.2.4.2.3.3 Evidentiality:

According to Aikhenvald¹¹, Evidentiality can be defined as a grammaticalized system for indicating the source of the information presented in a clause. Evidentials in Tai Ahom language are a gradual development out of tense and aspect morphemes. Especially, when we look at the various forms of past tense in Ahom language, markers of different evidentials become evident in the language. Ahom language generally mark two evidential specifications in affirmative clauses -

- Visual evidentials
- Non-visual evidentials

Visual evidentials are those that primarily involve information that have been perceived visually by a speaker. It includes statements that refer to generally known facts (with visual evidence). In Tai Ahom, the past indefinite marker /*jao* / and the perfective aspect marker /*si* / stand for visual evidence. Examples are already mentioned in section 3.2.4.2.1.2 above.

Non-visual evidentials are those that include information that is acquired first-hand (i.e., sensorily), but non-visually. The non-visual evidence in Ahom language is marked by the perfective aspect markers /*ka* /, /*kɔ* / and /*ɔ* /. Non-visual evidential in Tai Ahom is used to express certainty of events, established knowledge, etc. For example,

(184) /*luk-man cao-taipun kɔ* /
 child-3s HON-Taipung PERF
 ‘(They were) the children of Sir Taipung’

(185) /*man kã ka* /
 3s go PERF
 ‘He went/left’

¹¹ Aikhenvald, 2006

3.2.4.3 Causative and valency:

The marker of causative, /*heu* / is added before the verb in Tai Ahom language. For example,

(186) /*man heu kiñ khao haŋ luk ɔn* /
 3s CAUS eat rice DAT child young
 'He feeds the infant'

(187) /*haŋ kon nai heu ma* /
 DAT man this CAUS come
 'Let the man come'

3.3 Word formation processes:

As Tai Ahom language is monosyllabic and isolating by nature, every word retains its individual form. This makes word formation a very significant aspect of the language. The most important of word formation processes in Tai Ahom is compounding.

3.3.1 Compounding:

While discussing the various word formation processes in Tai languages, Grierson talks about compounding. Two different words with independent meaning are juxtaposed to form a compound. This system of compounding is typical in Siamese-Chinese languages, as pointed out by Grierson. Tai Ahom is also no different in this respect.

Compounds are widely used in Tai Ahom language. Due to the monosyllabic nature of the language, compounds seem to play a very significant role in the word formation process of Tai Ahom. Compounds have been extensively used in historical documents, inscriptions, copper-plates and chronicles of the Tai Ahom rulers of Assam.

Compounds are very frequently employed in Tai Ahom language for several reasons. In the first place, the Tai Ahom language is a tonal language, tone being

phonemic. Hence a single word can have several meanings depending on the change of tone. A word must, therefore, be carefully pronounced in its specific tone to convey a particular meaning. But even with careful pronunciation, the confusion in meaning cannot altogether be eliminated and scope for ambiguity still remains. To avoid any such confusion and ambiguity of meaning, the process of compounding of words is adopted. For instance, the two words /*di* / and /*ɲam* / convey, among all other connotations, a common meaning 'good' and the compound /*di-ɲam* / is formed by combining these two words which is employed to mean 'good' and nothing else.

The second reason for the wide use of compounds in Tai Ahom is that many simple words of the Indo-European languages do not have their counterparts in the Tai languages. Same is the case with the Tai Ahom language. Such words are expressed in Tai Ahom by compounding several simple words. For example, there is no single Tai Ahom word for expressing the verb 'to rule'. Instead, a compound /*kiñ-muŋ-kiñ-baŋ* / (*kiñ* 'to eat', *muŋ* 'country', *kiñ* 'to eat', *baŋ* 'village') is used, where the literal meaning is 'to eat country and village'.

Finally, compounds expand the range of vocabulary in a language contributing to the richness, beauty and stylistics of the language. For example, in Tai Ahom the verb 'to rule' may be expressed with the words /*kiñ-muŋ* / (*kiñ* 'to eat', *muŋ* 'country') i.e., 'to eat country'. But the compound /*kiñ-muŋ-kiñ-baŋ* / (literally, to eat country, to eat village, i.e., 'to rule') is richer in stylistics than /*kiñ-muŋ* /. Similarly, the compound /*raŋ-kan-pləŋ-kan* / (*raŋ* 'to consult', *kan* 'mutual', *pləŋ* 'to decide', *kan* 'mutual', i.e., 'mutual decision after consultation') is better than /*raŋ-kan* /; the compound /*phai-muŋ-phai-baŋ* / (*phai* 'to roam', *muŋ* 'country', *phai* 'to roam', *baŋ* 'village', i.e., 'to roam the country') is more relevant in terms of stylistics than /*phai-muŋ* / or /*phai-muŋ-baŋ* /.

Compounds in Tai Ahom also feature semantic reduplication¹². For instance, the compound /*kon-di-phu-di* / is employed to mean 'good man'. The meaning of

¹² Reduplication is discussed in section 3.3.2.

/kon-di / is the same as */phu-di /*. The compound */kon-di-phu-di /* will therefore, only mean ‘good man’ and nothing else. It is important to note that compounds of this category always carry a plural sense. Compounds can be formed by combining two or several words together. Compounds in Tai Ahom are mentioned with examples below.

a) Two-word compound:

(188) */pi-nɔŋ /*

elder brother-younger brother
‘brothers’

(189) */naŋ-cao /*

sister-young girl
‘young girl’

(190) */luk-lan /*

son-grandson
‘descendants’

(191) */muŋ-baŋ /*

country-village
‘the whole kingdom’

b) Three-word compound:

(192) */taŋ-baŋ-muŋ /*

all-village-country
‘in the whole country’

(193) */khup-ma-pɔi /*

kneel-come-prostrate
‘to come and prostrate in the Tai way’

- (194) /*hit-mun-khen* /
do-rejoice-night
'marry making at night'

c) Four-word compound:

- (195) /*mau-ru-mau-seŋ* /
priest-knowledge-priest-sacred
'chief priest'

- (196) /*hit-khru-hit-bij* /
do-canal-do-rampart
'to build fortress'

- (197) /*taŋ-pi-taŋ-nəŋ* /
all-elder-all-younger brother
'all the brothers'

d) Five-word compound:

- (198) /*thao-muŋ-khru-muŋ-ŋeu* /
old-country-officer-country-elder person
'elder persons of the country'

e) Six-word compound:

- (199) /*ru-riŋ-ru-pak-ru-sao* /
head-thousand-head-hundred-head-twenty
'captains of thousand, hundred and twenty persons'
- (200) /*raŋ-kan-pləŋ-kan-thuk-kan* /
consult-mutual-consider-mutual-decide-mutual
'mutual consultation, consideration and decision taken together'

A study on the formation and development of compounds in Tai Ahom based

on its historical documents, inscriptions and copper-plates throws light into some interesting points. They show that in the earlier period short compounds were in use. For instance, /*khup-pɔi* / ('to kneel and prostrate') used in the early period was extended in later period to /*ma-khup-ma-pɔi* / (come-kneel-come-prostrate, i.e., 'to come and prostrate in the Tai way'). Similarly, /*raŋ* / ('to consult') of the earlier period was extended to /*raŋ-kan* / ('to consult together'). Further it was extended to /*raŋ-kan-plɔŋ-kan-thuk-kan-seŋ-kan-baŋ-kan* / ('oath taking by mutual consultation and consideration'). But it does not mean that short compounds were not used in later period. On the whole, there was a tendency to use long compounds. In other words, compounds became phrasal in nature.

Another important point is that in the early periods compounds were not very frequently used. Therefore, we find less number of compounds in the early period.

A third point is that some compounds of the early period had become obsolete; in their place new compounds had been introduced.

While talking about compounds, Grierson¹³ points out that compounding is typical in all Siamese-Chinese languages. The Tai Ahom language is extremely rich in compounding or juxtaposition of various words. Instead of affixes, words with their independent meanings are used as modifiers in the compounds. Following types of compounds can be found in Tai Ahom language.

f) Endocentric compounds:

Here, the compound has only the meaning of the dominant word, the other word getting delexicalized. For instance,

Delexicalized

(201) /*khɔŋ-liŋ* /

goods-monkey

'goods and belongings'

¹³ Grierson (1903)

Reverse process can also be seen. That is, the case of lexicalization. Take the following example,

Lexicalized

(202) /*phrat-to* /

(?)-boundary

'to extend the boundary'

In the above example, the first word (an empty morpheme) does not carry any meaning if pronounced alone.

g) Exocentric compounds:

None of the constituents of the compound acts as a head. For example,

(203) /*khraŋ-khrɔi* /

goods-to be destroyed

'an alligator'

h) Dwandwa compounds:

Here, the meanings of both words are required for the construction of the meaning of the compound. For example,

(204) /*phaŋ-phok* /

foreigner-to be white

'a white foreigner, the English'

Some other forms of compounds (e.g., verb and verb, noun and verb, etc.) have been discussed earlier in this chapter (i.e., in section 3.2.1.1 Nouns). It is also noticed that in most cases that the left constituent of a compound is normally the head. It indicates that the syntactic category of the compound as a whole is that of the left constituent. Some more examples are cited below. For example,

- (205) /*uk-sa* /
all-anger
'all'
- (206) /*kap-to* /
to join-boundary
'to join something broken'
- (207) /*kheŋ-bai* /
to save-to put
'to help'
- (208) /*rak-kan* /
affection-side
'to love'
- (209) /*nuŋ-taŋ* /
to wear-all
'to put on cloth'

A similar example of language with left-headed compounds is Maori, spoken in New Zealand¹⁴. For example,

- (210) /*roro-hiko* /
brain-electricity
'computer'
- (211) /*wai-maŋu* /
water-black
'ink'

¹⁴ Booi, 2005.

- (212) /*whare-heihei* /
house-hen
'hen-house'

However, compounds in Ahom tend to follow both right-headed and left-headed compound types as a whole. Similarly, Italian also has both right-headed and left-headed compounds as pointed out by Booij (2005). Examples are given below.

- (213) /*kapo-stazione* /
master-station
'station master'

- (214) /*dzentil-uomo* /
kind-man
'gentleman'

3.3.2 Reduplication:

It is remarkable that reduplication is not a very widely known phenomenon in Tai Ahom language. It is significant that there are no examples of reduplicated words found regarding kinship terms in the language. However, some examples are given below.

/*kep kep* / 'to bind fast'

/*kai kai* / 'gradually'

/*kiu kiu* / 'very bright'

/*ŋa ŋa* / 'many moles'

/*ta phip phip* / 'to wink often and often'

/*tak ip tak* / 'to become poor'

/*tuk tuk* / 'healthy'

/*pha pha* / 'lightning'

/*la la* / 'ocean'

/su su/ 'straight'

Tai Ahom features complete lexical reduplication¹⁵. The language also features discontinuous reduplication (we have found one example - */tak ip tak /*). It is important to note that reduplication does not change grammatical class of the words. Significantly, reduplication in Tai Ahom plays certain semantic as well as syntactic functions in the grammar of the language. Among its various semantic functions, the reduplicated structures most commonly feature 'emphasis'; that is, the words are reduplicated mostly to emphasize the content (or the central value) of the word in question. Among the syntactic functions, reduplicated words in Tai Ahom designate various aspects such as continuity, simultaneity, iterativity, etc. The reduplicated words are listed below along with their semantic and syntactic functions.

Reduplicated words	Word class of root words	Semantic function	Syntactic function
<i>/kiu kiu /</i> 'very bright'	Adjective	Emphasis	Simultaneity
<i>/tuk tuk /</i> 'healthy'	Adjective	Emphasis	Simultaneity
<i>/su su /</i> 'straight'	Adjective	Exclusiveness	Continuity
<i>/kai kai /</i> 'gradually'	Adverb	Emphasis	Continuity
<i>/ŋa ŋa /</i> 'many moles'	Noun	Intensity	Plurality
<i>/kep kep /</i> 'to bind fast'	Verb	Iterative	Iterativity, continuity

¹⁵ Abbi (2001) discusses different types of reduplication at length.

/ta phip phip / 'to wink often and often'	Verb	Iterative	Iterativity
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Table 3.10: *Reduplication in Tai Ahom.*

3.4 Conclusion:

In terms of findings in various morphological aspects, the Tai Ahom language provides a wide scope for impending research. The most significant of all is the intensity of compounding found in the language. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, the nature of monosyllabicity makes way for this richness in compounds. Similarly, classifiers are also crucial. Especially noun classifiers are quite common in the Ahom language. Adjectives in the Tai Ahom language always follow the nouns they qualify whereas personal pronouns carry the aspect of honorificity (similar to the Assamese language, its closest neighbor). In terms of verb tenses, Tai Ahom includes a number of aspect markers in order to indicate modality of action. In the context of past tense in Ahom, the aspect of Evidentiality is a great development with the categorization of visual/non-visual evidentials. Explicator compound verbs or ECVs are also present in the language although not so frequent. The basic semantic function of the explicator verb indicates perfectivity of action as in other Indian languages (Masica 1976, Abbi 1991). A lesser used function even indicates continuity.

Chapter 4

Syntax

4.1 Introduction:

The Tai Ahom language is monosyllabic in nature and it follows SVO word order. Section 4.2 deals in detail with the main and other word order patterns of the language while section 4.3 describes all the major and minor sentence types found in Tai Ahom. Some complex sentence structures are also found in the language, although not so frequently, section 4.3.2 briefly analyzes such sentences. Coordination structures are discussed in section 4.4. The scope of negation in Tai Ahom sentences is examined in section 4.5.

4.2 Word order:

The word order of the Tai Ahom language is SVO. It is remarkable that the nature of word order in different Tai languages differs. For example, Shan and Khamti follow SOV - Khamti being greatly influenced by and isolated among Tibeto-Burman languages. In Siamese, it is SVO as in Khasi, the isolated Austro-Asiatic language in the northeast India. What is universal to all Tai languages is that, as mentioned in earlier chapters, the adjective follows the word it modifies. It is important to mention here that in case of the Ahom language, the genitive is not marked. But the relative word marking possessive follows the noun (see section 3.2.1.5.7 in Chapter 3). It is significant that although different Tai languages show considerable variation in word ordering, SVO remains the common word order in all the Tai languages spoken in India as pointed out in Diller, Edmondson and Luo¹.

Variability of word order in the Tai Ahom language is a significant point of serious speculation. Diller et al discuss that the variation in word order patterns in the Tai languages of Assam has considerable areal influence due to their close contact with the neighboring languages of the Tibeto-Burman family for many centuries. More particularly, their contact with some Indo-Aryan languages, especially Assamese is one of the most important reasons for such variability. This is evident in case of Tai Ahom. Language contact is the primary factor influencing variation in

¹ In Diller, Edmondson and Luo, 2008.

word ordering of the language. First of all, Tai Ahom has been surrounded by a number of Tibeto-Burman languages for many centuries right from the period the Ahom rulers stepped in the valley of Assam in the 13th century. Most of the Tibeto-Burman languages in the northeast India are OV languages or SOV and generally fairly verb-final². Besides, the word order of Tai Ahom is greatly influenced by its close contact with Assamese from the Indo-Aryan family that follows SOV order. These are the factors causing variation in the word ordering of Tai Ahom. Besides SVO, other word order patterns found in the Tai Ahom language are - OSV, SV and SO. The word order patterns of the Tai Ahom language are mentioned below along with the examples.

a) SVO

(215) /*rao kiñ khao* /
 1p eat rice
 ‘We eat rice’

(216) /*cu bao kiñ ja* /
 tiger NEG eat grass
 ‘The tiger does not eat grass’

(217) /*mina ma lup pɔ-man* /
 Mina come INS father-HON
 ‘Mina came with her father’

In case if an SVO construction has two objects - direct (i.e.O₁) and indirect (O₂), then the latter usually precedes the former one. For instance,

b) SVO₂O₁

(218) /*hɔri hau nam su ti luk-nej* /
 Hari give milk DAT child-FG
 ‘Hari gave milk to the girl’

² Dryer (2008) discusses OV features in Tibeto-Burman languages.

However, there is one sentence pattern, where the direct object (O₁) precedes the indirect one (O₂). Here, the direct object is placed at the beginning of the sentence and the indirect object comes at the end of it. For example,

c) O₁SVO₂

(219) /*ti* *khao* *kao* *tham* *kham* *kɔi* /
 OBJ 3p 1s ask word PERF

‘I asked them about the matter’

(220) /*kon* *phan* *mai* *mou* *hau* *tra* /
 man poor DAT 2s give money

‘Give money to the poor man’

Another observable word order pattern in Tai Ahom includes the SVO structure with its object working as a marker of incorporation by occurring between the main verb and other verbal categories. Examples are cited below.

d) SV-O-V

(221) /*kon* *rao* *puk* *dɔi* *bao* *dai* *kɔi* /
 man 1p climb hill NEG can PERF

‘Our men could not climb the hill’

(222) /*mou* *klin* *nam niŋ* *bao* *thuk* *kɔi* /
 2s drink tea NEG should PERF

‘You should not have drunk tea’

(223) /*man* *kiñ* *khao* *si* *u* /
 3s eat rice NF CON

‘S/he is eating rice’

e) OSV

- (224) /*kao mai ram hañ jao* /
 1s OBJ Ram see PST
 ‘Ram saw me’

- (225) /*mu-tu lej mɔnu pɔ tai kɔi* /
 pig-CL one Manu beat to death PERF
 ‘Manu beat a pig to death’

If the verbal construction of the sentence is an explicator compound verb³, then the sentence pattern goes like this - OSV₁V₂ where V₁ stands for the principal verb and V₂, the explicator verb. V₂ can either precede or follow V₁. For example,

f) OSV₁V₂

- (226) /*luk nam su ɔ kã su* /
 ABL milk nectar go MEET
 ‘Nectar is made from milk’

- (227) /*lik nan man tak phat ta* /
 book that 3s FUT read THINK
 ‘He will read that book’

g) SV₂V₁

- (228) /*khag na bun rao ju* /
 before noon 1p STAY
tha mu thuk ti-u-kɔi /
 wait tomorrow FUT-CON-PERF
 ‘We will be waiting from before noon tomorrow’

h) SV

³ ECV construction in Tai Ahom is already discussed at length in 3.2.4.1.4 in the third chapter.

(229) /*nuĕ-tu phuj* /

bird-CL fly

'The bird is flying'

(230) /*man-cao bao pai ma* /

3s-HON NEG not come

'He has not come yet'

i) SO

(231) /*an-nai doi patkai* /

this hill Patkai

'This is Patkai hill'

(232) /*phak ma phit phit* /

curry spicy spicy

'The curry is very hot'

(233) /*luk-peŋ bab kat* /

pampered child NEG industrious

'A pampered child is not industrious' (A popular saying)

4.3 Sentence types:

Tai Ahom shows both simple and complex sentence structures. The monosyllabicity of the language indicates frequent occurrence of simple constructions.

4.3.1 Simple sentences:

Major simple sentence types observed in the Ahom language are - declarative, imperative and interrogative. Some examples of simple sentences in Tai Ahom are cited below.

a) Declarative sentences:

Declarative sentences are the most common observed in the Tai Ahom language. Examples are the following.

(234) /*kao kin khao* /
 Is eat rice
 'I eat rice'

(235) /*kao kin khao si u* /
 Is eat rice NF CON
 'I am eating rice'

(236) /*man kā jao ma* /
 3s go PST come
 'He went and returned'

(237) /*man kin khao jo si tak kā* /
 3s eat rice after NF FUT go
 'He will go after having eaten rice'

b) Imperative sentences:

Imperative sentences in Ahom are usually represented by three different markers /*ta* /, /*la* / and /*na* /. The last two are also the request markers of the language. These markers are added after the main verb. For example,

(238) /*ti kao hau ma ta* /
 OBJ Is give COME IMP
 'Give (it to) me'

(239) /*kao kā na* /
 Is go IMP+REQ

‘(Please permit me) I go’ or ‘Let me go’

- (240) /*ku mu ku ban ap nam ta* /
 everyday bathe water IMP
 ‘Bathe everyday’

- (241) /*paĩ kai kai* /
 go quickly
 ‘Go quickly’

Imperative can be negated by means of the negative particles in Tai Ahom. The negative marker often precedes the verb as well as occurs in the beginning of the imperative sentence. For instance,

- (242) /*pai hai ju jin jin* /
 NEG shout stay calmly
 ‘Don’t shout, stay calmly’

c) Interrogative sentences:

Tai Ahom speakers use WH questions by means of several question words - /*ka-saj* /, /*an-neu* /, /*se* /, /*saj* /, /*phreu* /, /*ti leu* /, /*neu* /, /*an* / and /*an-phreu* /. These question words normally occur in the beginning or end of the interrogative sentences. They can also be used in the word-medial position of the sentence. Note that there is no question marker used in Tai Ahom. For example,

- (243) /*cu mou ka-saj* /
 name 2s what
 ‘What is your name?’

- (244) /*an-neu mou la* /
 which one 2s want
 ‘Which one do you want?’

- (245) /*luk se saŋ pin ma* /
 ABL what what start get

‘What did it get started from?’

- (246) /*luŋ phreu mou ma* /
 INS who 2s come

‘With whom have you come?’

- (247) /*mou luk ti leu ma* /
 2s ABL where come

‘Where are you coming from?’

Regarding yes-no questions, /*no* / is used word-finally in a sentence. The particle can be denoted as a marker to confirm a statement. For instance,

- (248) /*su dai ŋen jao no* /
 2p get money PST CONF

‘You got some money, didn’t you?’

- (249) /*mou tak paī no* /
 2s FUT go CONF

‘You will go, won’t you?’

d) Copular sentences:

There are a number of verb forms that are employed in the copular sentences of Tai Ahom - /*ju* /, /*jaŋ* / and /*la* /. The copula may take a predicate noun, predicate adjective or predicate adverb as a complement. However, occurrence of the copula verb is not obligatory in Tai Ahom. For instance,

(250) /*khan* *khao-san* *ju* *mao* /
 price uncooked rice be cheap
 ‘Rice is cheap’

(251) /*luk-ne* *luk* *mɔŋ* /
 boy-NOM boy clever
 ‘The boy is clever’

The copula verb is observed to be in use generally in affirmative sentences. However, its occurrence in the negative sentences is also visible sometimes. For instance,

(252) /*man* *bab* *pin* *ju* *peŋ* *tai* /
 3s NEG become be female Tai
 ‘She is not a Tai woman’

(253) /*man* *la* *kha* *baŋ* *mai* *kheŋ* *di* *taŋ mut* /
 3s be boy village OBJ COMP good SUP
 ‘He is the best among all village boys’

(254) /*tun-ruŋ* *tun* *ju* *klaŋ* *na* *kɔi* /
 CL-peepul tree be middle field PERF
 ‘The peepul tree is in the middle of the field’

(255) /*hu-khao* *taŋ lai* *ju* *klaŋ* *na* *kɔi* /
 cow-3p all be middle field PERF
 ‘All the cows are in the middle of the field’

(256) /*mu kɔn* *cao-pha* *muŋ dun* *ju* *ti* *ce mun* /
 ancient day HON-king Assam be LOC Rangpur
 ‘In ancient days, the Ahom kings were at Rangpur’

4.3.2 Complex sentences:

Complex sentences in Ahom are formed by one or more subordinate clauses, which can be either finite or non-finite.

a) Finite subordinate clause:

Finite subordinate clauses in Tai Ahom are linked to the main clause by the subordinator /*sam*/ 'that', which either precedes or follows the main verb. Similarly, the main clause can also precede or follow the subordinate clause. For example,

- (257) /*mou-ne* *tak* *paĩ* *ti*
 2s-NOM FUT go LOC
 ti jao *sam* *cao-sengpha* *ru /*
 Dibrugarh that HON-Sengpha know
 'Sir Sengpha knows that you will go to Dibrugarh'

- (258) /*mou* *ru* *sam* *khao* *kiĩ*
 2s know that rice eat
 khej *khao* *kiĩ* *tai /*
 save rice eat kill
 'You know that rice saves (and) rice kills' (A proverb)

b) Non-finite subordinate clause:

In terms of non-finite subordinate clause as in the case of infinitive, the infinitive marker is placed before the verb in the embedded clause. For instance,

- (259) /*nɔŋ* *man* *paĩ* *ti*
 younger brother 3s go LOC
 hen-sɔn-lik *ti* *sɔn /*
 house-learn-book INF learn
 'His younger brother goes to school to study'

- (260) /*man ma ti phat lik*/
 3s come INF read book
 ‘He has come to study books’

With regard to nominalization of the infinitive, the infinitive marker /*dai*/ is placed before the infinite verb. For example,

- (261) /*dai phuk lɔŋ mou kheŋ ɟao*/
 NF learn swim 2s save PST
 ‘Your learning to swim saved you’

- (262) /*pɔ-man hɔn kan nai dai klin nam lao kao*/
 father-HON never tolerate NF drink rice beer 1s
 ‘Father never tolerates my drinking rice beer’

c) Adverbial clause:

Adverbial clauses in Tai Ahom can be both finite and non-finite. They usually occur before the main clause. For instance,

- (263) /*baɪ nan phreu nai mou*
 day that when 2s
ma ti nan nan raŋ kan plaŋ kan si-ɟao/
 come there consult secretly PERF-PST
 ‘That day when you came there, the discussion was already over’

- (264) /*kham dai ŋin kon-phu run ɟao*/
 matter NF hear man-CL cry PST
 ‘The man cried hearing the news’

- (265) /*paɪ ti nazira kao ti sɔm mou*/
 go LOC Nazira 1s FUT meet 2s

'I will meet you (after) reaching Nazira'

- (266) /luk-cai-phu run ma ti ren/
 child-MG-CL cry come LOC home
 'The child came home crying'

4.4 Coordination:

Sentence coordination in Tai Ahom is marked by a number of morphemes - /sam/ or /le/ or /an/ 'and', /sam/ 'but', /saŋ...sam/ 'if...then', and so on. Some forms of the Ahom conjunctions are already discussed in earlier chapters⁴. examples are given below.

4.4.1 /saŋ...sam/ 'if...then' coordination:

The conditional conjunction morphemes /saŋ...sam/ 'if...then' are used as following. /saŋ/ 'if' occurs before the subject of the conditional clause often in the beginning of the sentence, or after the subject of the conditional clause. Whereas /sam/ 'then' occurs before the main phrase. Its occurrence is optional. For instance,

- (267) /saŋ man ma sam kao ko paĩ jao/
 if 3s come then 1s also go PST
 'If he had come, then I too would have gone'

- (268) /saŋ mou mai hañ koi
 if 2s OBJ see PERF
 man rik mou jao/
 3s call 2s PST
 'If he had seen you, he would have called you'

- (269) /saŋ ba mou jaŋ ren
 if NEG 2s have house

⁴ Conjunction markers are discussed in section 3.2.1.6 in the third chapter.

sam ju ren kao /
 then stay house 1s

‘If you don’t have a house, then (you can) stay at my house’

(270) */saŋ kin khao dai*
 if eat rice can
kon-phu rai si bao jao /
 man-CL die NEG PST

‘The man would not have been dead if he could eat food’

(271) */saŋ ba mɔnu dai lik*
 if NEG Manu get book
sam man jɔn kao /
 then 3s ask 1s

‘If Manu had not gotten the book, then he would have asked me’

4.4.2 /*sam*/ ‘but’ coordination:

The coordinator /*sam*/ is usually placed before the beginning of the second conjunct. For instance,

(272) */man rɔŋ hai sam kon-phu*
 3s shout loudly but man-CL
kɔ bab ma /
 all NEG come

‘He shouted loudly but no one came’

‘But’ coordination of verbs can also involve a negative particle preceding or following the adversative conjuncts. For example,

(273) /*nuĕ-ka' bin dai sam nuĕ-pit bao dai* /
 CL-crow fly can but CL-duck NEG can
 'Crows can fly but ducks cannot'

(274) /*man bao paĩ ti nan sam*
 3s NEG go LOC there but
man rik rita ti ren man /
 3s call Rita LOC house 3s
 'He did not go there, but he called Rita to his house'

4.4.3 /*sam* / or /*le* / or /*an* / 'and' coordination:

'And' coordination is used to conjoin two or more sentences or phrases in Tai Ahom. The conjunction morpheme occurs before every conjunct. For instance,

(275) /*kao tak paĩ ti nazira le sɔm mou* /
 1s FUT go LOC Nazira and meet 2s
 'I will go to Nazira and meet you'

(276) /*ao lik sam paĩ ti ho sɔn lik* /
 take book and go LOC school
 'Take the books and go to school'

4.5 Negation:

The negative markers used in the Tai Ahom language are - /*bao, bab, pai, saŋ, hoŋ* /. Imperative sentences in Tai Ahom are negated by the particle /*ja* /, which occurs in the beginning of the sentence. Sometimes, /*pai* / is also used to mark the negative imperative. There are both pre and post-verbal negations in Tai Ahom, but most commonly, the negative markers are pre-verbal⁵. The position of the negation markers in a sentence is described below.

⁵ Swart (2010) argues that SVO languages are most commonly SNegVO, i.e., they have pre-verbal

Negation markers	Position in sentence
/bao/	pre-verbal
/bab/	after the main verb and precedes other verbal categories
/pai/	pre-verbal
/saŋ/	pre-verbal
/hɔn/	pre-verbal
/ja/	pre-verbal and sentence-initial

Table 4.1: Position of negation markers in Tai Ahom.

Examples of negative sentences in Tai Ahom are given below.

/bao/

- (277) /*khao-san* *rao* *bao* *jaŋ* /
 uncooked rice 1p NEG have
 ‘We have no rice’

/bab/

- (278) /*man* *tʰem* *lik* *bab* *dai* /
 3s write letter NEG can
 ‘He cannot write letters’

/saŋ/

- (279) /*khao* *kao* *saŋ* *hañ* *jao* /
 3p 1s NEG see PST
 ‘I did not see them’

/ja/

- (280) /*ja* *kã* *rem* *khe-nam* /
 NEG go edge river

negation.

‘Do not go to the edge of the river’

/pai / and /hɔn /

These two are the negative adverbs found in Tai Ahom. In case of the negative adverbs, Tai Ahom uses double negatives to resolve to a negative that is usually perceived as an emphasis⁶. So the double negatives in Tai Ahom are */bao pai /* and */bao hɔn /*. In both cases, the negative marker */bao /* can be optional because single or double negation in the language always resolves to a negative. Examples of double negatives in Tai Ahom are,

(281) */man-cao bao pai ma /*

3s-HON NEG not come

‘He has not come yet’

(282) */luk-cai bao pai bau /*

child-MG NEG not adult

‘The boy has not grown up yet’

(283) */bao hɔn kiŋ /*

NEG never eat

‘(It is) never to be eaten’

(284) */phak-hit nai bao hɔn kiŋ /*

vegetable-mushroom this NEG never eat

‘This kind of mushroom is never to be eaten’

(285) */pɔ-man hɔn kan nai dai klin nam lao kao /*

father-HON never tolerate can drink rice beer Is

‘Father can never tolerate my drinking of rice beer’

⁶ Shopen (1985) provides a detailed discussion on negative adverbs and double negatives.

4.5.1 Scope of negation:

The concept of the scope of negation brings remarkable difference in meaning. Negation in the Tai Ahom language shows in various sentence structures including modal verbs, imperatives and other construction types. Let us consider the following sentences,

(286) /*mou* *bao* *dai* *klin* *nam niŋ* /
 2s NEG can drink tea
 ‘You can not drink tea’

(287) /*ja* *klin* *nam niŋ* /
 NEG drink tea
 ‘Do not drink tea’

(288) /*mou* *bao* *klin* *nam niŋ* *jao* /
 2s NEG drink tea PST
 ‘You did not drink tea’

In the examples above, the negation applies to the VP ‘drink tea’. Both in sentences (286) and (287), the scope of negation falls over the prohibition on part of the subject’s ‘drinking of tea’. So the scope of negation in imperative sentences is the main verb or verb phrase. In sentence (288), the scope of negation covers the entire verb phrase. In terms of the negative adverbs and double negation in Tai Ahom, the scope of negation always falls over the main verb (examples of double negatives are cited above). In other words, the scope of negation in Tai Ahom is usually rightward as it covers the expression immediately following the negation marker. This is a common phenomenon in Sino-Tibetan languages⁷.

4.6 Conclusion:

The common word order of the Tai Ahom language is SVO, however, there is a significant aspect of variability evident in the word ordering of the language. The

⁷ Thurgood and LaPolla (2003) discuss the rightward negative scoping of Sino-Tibetan languages

most important factor contributing to its word order variation is Tai Ahom's close contact with other neighboring language families, particularly, languages from the Tibeto-Burman family and Assamese, a language from the Indo-Aryan family. Language contact between Tai Ahom and these language families has been prevalent for many centuries due to which the language features considerable areal influence over its variability of word order patterns.

As SVO is the most frequent word order pattern observed in Tai Ahom, the sequence of verb (V) and object (O) is also prevalent in other word orders noticed in the language, for instance, in the cases of sentences with double verbs (explicator compound verb constructions as well as main verb-verbal category constructions) or double objects (direct and indirect objects). The examples are already discussed above. With regard to object or verb sequences in the sentence, the language shows two choices of sequencing the particles: first, the sequence of direct and indirect object can both precede or/and follow each other, and second, the sequence of main verb and secondary verb also follows the same rule. Therefore, if a sentence carries two objects, the sequence can be either O_1O_2 or O_2O_1 . Same argument applies for sentences with two verbs.

The Ahom speakers mainly use simple sentence types for general conversation. However, complex sentences are also in use if not quite frequently. In case of the complex sentences, a considerable amount of flexibility is allowed in the sequencing. For instance, the finite subordinate clause can precede or follow the main clause while the same kind of flexibility is prevalent in the sequencing of the connecting subordinator and the main verb. Coordination is significant in Tai Ahom, and it is marked by several coordinators. Flexibility of sequencing is also observed in the construction of sentences with coordinators.

Negation plays an important syntactic feature in Tai Ahom. The language contains a number of negative markers negating various syntactic constructions including modal verbs, auxiliaries, imperatives, and so on. The negative markers can occur either pre or post-verbally in the sentence. Negative markers in imperative

including a wide variety of Chinese dialects.

sentences usually occur in initial position of the sentence. One of the interesting aspects of negation in Tai Ahom is that it features the presence of double negation in terms of negative adverbs. It is important to note that double negatives in the language resolve to a negative.

Chapter 5

Sociolinguistic Aspects

5.1 Introduction:

The significance of the Tai Ahom language lies mainly in the fact that the history of Assam's glorious past is recorded in this language. From 16th century onwards, the development of Assamese language started dominating the Ahom court as well as the common household of Assamese people. This has further brought to notice a number of issues to be discussed; for instance, the cases of language shift and language change (discussed here in section 5.2). Besides, there has been noticed remarkable features of language contact and borrowings exchanged between Tai Ahom and Assamese that are discussed in section 5.3. Topics of language and culture including kinship terms, various forms of address and of request are discussed at length in section 5.4. As the language is disappearing fast to the extent of being extinct, there has been some ray of hope noticed as there are formative plans of language revival initiated by the government of Assam (discussed in section 5.5).

5.2 Language shift and language change:

The Tai Ahom language is on the verge of extinction now, the principle reason of its disappearance being the advent and strong influence of Assamese language. In a sociolinguistic point of view, the issues of language shift and language change are of essential significance in Tai Ahom. In order to check the issue of language change in Tai Ahom, we need to examine what happened in the history of this language and what exactly led to its shift and gradual extinction.

5.2.1 Historical background:

The Ahoms brought along with them their language and rich culture. The medium of communication as well as of literary works was Ahom since the reign of Su-ka-pha, the founding king (*/swɔrgɔdeu /* in Assamese) of the Ahom dynasty. From the time of the fourth Ahom king, the language started fading away slowly (mid-15th century AD onwards). As already mentioned in the first chapter¹, by the time of the fifth king, Assamese language came into being – functioning both as an

¹ See section 1.2

official language and a layman's common spoken form. By the advent of Srimanta Sankaradeva² (16th century AD), the great Vaisnavite reformer, Assamese came into the forefront while Tai Ahom took a backseat forever. From the later part of the 16th century AD, Tai historians started writing their manuscripts in Assamese prose as well as in Tai Ahom. The commoners also preferred a relatively simple and toneless Assamese language to the complicated tonal Tai Ahom language.

The Hinduization of the Ahoms is one of the principal reasons behind their inclination towards the Assamese language. The process of Hinduization started during the reign of the Ahom king *Rudra Singha* (beginning of the 17th century AD). During this period, the Assamese language also managed to get an equal status to that of Tai Ahom in the royal court. It consequently resulted in the increasing importance of Assamese language and thus ruling out Tai Ahom language. Such was the influence of the Hinduization process that from now onwards the Ahom rulers started acquiring Hindu names (e.g., *Rudra Singha*, *Rajeshwar Singha* etc.) besides their Tai Ahom names. The writing of Ahom history in Assamese along with Tai Ahom language continued.

The process of language shift started taking place as soon as the Assamese language came into being. The Ahoms accepted the Assamese language and tried their best for the enhancement of it. This further helped Assamese language root firmly. Gradually, the influence of the Tai Ahom language began declining. The succeeding generations embraced Assamese language, thus paving the way for the decaying status of Tai Ahom, to the extent that the Tai Ahom language became inconceivable to the young people. Now the language is accessible only to a few hundreds of them.

There is also a considerable amount of language variation seen in the language in the present scenario. Also, there are different varieties of the speech dialects (i.e., idiolects, which are one of the popular approaches linguists like to adopt in studying an 'exotic' language (Wardhaugh: 1986) now being practiced and taught among these speakers and new learners. As the sense of language revival has grown recently, there is a lot of debate going on in order to determine the original speech and its rules.

² The forerunner of the Bhakti movement in Assam.

However, this has only given way to a possible study and exploration of the vast arena of sociolinguistic matters regarding the Tai Ahom language.

5.2.2 Language variation:

When it comes to the study of the Tai Ahom language, there is hardly any resource left apart from the ancient manuscripts and a few hundred speakers from its priestly class. It is interesting to know that there is a considerable amount of variation of the language noticed even among these few speakers. On one hand, it is bit disappointing to realize that there is no original form of the speech to be found among the speakers. But on the other hand, the wide range of linguistic variation maintained by these speakers can very effectively and with great interest, draws an immense amount of research on the aspect of language variation. For example, in the district of Sivasagar alone, there can be witnessed a huge amount of variation among the Tai Ahom speakers, most of these being phonological variation.

a) Phonological variation:

In the case of vocalic variation, an interesting aspect is the application of central vowels. It is significant to mention that there is no central vowel in use in Tai Ahom at present. Yet, a few old speakers do claim that central vowels were present in the old scripts, and hence they like to follow them still in their speech. There are two central vowels that have come to notice while doing the fieldwork. These are /*ə*/ and /*ɨ*/. The variants of these two sounds are /*ao*/ and /*u*/, respectively. Although the variants are widely used in speech at present, the use of these central vowels can also be seen in the speech of old speakers, at least in two of my informants. In regard to the central vowels, it is normally found that a palatalized consonant precedes the central vowel. In the context of the vowel /*ə*/, there cannot be any consonant occurring word-finally. Whereas with /*ɨ*/, consonants can occur at the end position of a word. This is also applicable in the use of the variants. Some examples are given below.

/kʰə/ ~ /kao/ 'to remember'

/mʰə/ ~ /mao/ 'to become pale'

/m^hu ~ /mu / 'time'

/m^hun / ~ /mun / 'pillow'

/m^huŋ / ~ /muŋ / 'country'

However, a consonant can follow /ə / (and its variant) only when the word is compounded. In the case of /u / and its variant, consonants can both precede and follow the vowel. For example,

/k^hə-kiu / ~ /kao-kiu / 'the nine planets'

/j^hə-k^hə / ~ /jao-kao / 'cobweb'

/p^hum-na / ~ /pum-na / 'a Brahmin'

/m^huŋ-phi / ~ /muŋ-phi / 'abode of gods'

There is also consonantal variation found among the speakers. For example, the palatal /c / has two variants, /s / (now used by most speakers) and a palatalized /ʃ / (an older form of the sound still pronounced by some old speakers). Examples are,

/cu-ka-pha / ~ /su-ka-pha / ~ /ʃu-ka-pha / 'first Ahom king'

/cu / ~ /su / ~ /ʃu / 'tiger'

Variation can be seen in the use of tones too. Speakers show difference in terms of the actual number of tones. For example, the old speakers generally use three or four tones – high rising, high, low and level tones (as noticed in the fieldwork). One old informant from the priestly class managed to speak in three tones – high rising, low and level tones. The new learners are being taught the use of six tones – high rising, high, low with glottal stop at the end, low, falling and level tone with slightly rising at the end. However, most of the current speakers of Tai Ahom now use three tones - level tone with slight rising at the end, high tone and low tone. Others (apart from the priests and students) don't use tones at all.

The data for this variation study have been collected from the district of

Sivasagar. The informants have been classified under two general groups: **Group A)** old speakers and new learners, and **Group B)** old speakers belonging to the priestly class. The data with the pronunciation of the central vowels and the palatal /c/, are collected from the two informants of the priestly class (i.e., Group B). It is also observed that the Ahom priests exercise these articulations usually in the prayers and chants in various rituals (e.g., /*me-dam-me-phi*/ a religious ceremony in reverence of ancestors, or /*phu-ra-luŋ*/ another religious observance in respect of the religious scripture of the Ahoms in the same name) and sacred ceremonies like marriage (i.e., /*sok-lɔŋ*/ where the wedding vows exchanged between the bride and groom are to be performed in the pious hymns in this language). In such a case, interaction between such a linguistic variation and a social variation is evenly expected. A possible explanation for it can be the issue of social class labeling; where such varied dictions are intended to distinguish the higher-class people (in this case, the Ahom priests) from others.

However, the main reason for these variations is the strong influence of Assamese language. Assamese does not have any central vowel, nor the palatal /c/ and it is toneless. So the Ahom speakers simply turned to incline towards a comparatively simple language and gradually gave in to the influence of Assamese over their original Tai Ahom speech. It is notable that there is no difference between male and female speech in Tai Ahom.

5.3 Language contact and borrowings:

Ever since the Tai Ahoms established themselves in Assam, they came in contact with the multifarious races with their diverse languages, for instance, Kachari, Chutiya, Moran, Miri, Lalung, and so on. The first Ahom king Su-ka-pha successfully assimilated all these local aborigines together in order to build his vast kingdom. But interestingly, the Ahoms did not impose their language on these people. Instead, they acknowledged the local language and culture with great fervor. The most remarkable outcome of this linguistic and cultural assimilation is the development of the Assamese language. The Ahoms too, like other locals, gave in to the effort of the growth and progress of the Assamese language, by granting an equally significant status to it as that of the Tai Ahom language in the royal court. It efficiently paved the

way for the strong influence of Assamese, resulting in the gradual disappearance of the Tai Ahom language.

The Ahoms ruled Assam for six hundred years, gave Assamese the equal status of the Tai Ahom language, and wrote their history in both languages. Therefore, it is quite natural that Tai Ahom words and expressions found their way into Assamese prose to the extent that the enormous vocabulary of current Assamese language is abundant with numerous Tai Ahom words. During the long period of their rule, the Ahoms used different terms for places, rivers, hills and lakes in their own language. The tradition of the naming of places started with the advent of the first Ahom king Su-ka-pha. The Tai Ahom historical documents abound in such names. The names of these places remain same till date. Instances of such names are given below with their meanings.

Namrup – It is a place in the district of Dibrugarh. The word ‘Namrup’ seems to have derived from the word */nam-ruk/* (*/nam/* ‘water or river’, */ruk/* ‘six’, meaning ‘the sixth river’). The word */rup/* probably has been derived from the word */ruk/*.

Namdang – It is a tributary of the river Brahmaputra in Sivasagar sub-division (*/nam/* ‘river’, */deŋ/* ‘red’, meaning ‘muddy water’).

Nazira – A place in the district of Sivasagar (*/na/* ‘field’, */ji/* ‘slanting’, */ra/* ‘much’, meaning ‘a slanting rice field’).

Teok – A place in the district of Jorhat (*/ti/* ‘place’, */ɔk/* ‘ghee’, meaning ‘a place where ghee is available’).

Sepon – A place in Sivasagar (*/se/* ‘town’, */pɔn/* ‘cotton’, meaning ‘a place where cotton is available’).

Charaideo – A place in Sivasagar district (*/se/* ‘town’, */rai/* ‘shining’, */dɔi/* ‘hill’, meaning ‘a town shining on the hilltop’). It is regarded as a holy place by the Ahom

people. Ahom kings and members of the royal families were buried here. Huge earth mounds of pyramidal type, known as */moidam/* were raised over the graves. Every year in commemoration of their ancestral kings, the Ahom people assemble there to offer their prayers to their kings in the traditional way known as */me-dam-me-phi/*.

The surnames of Ahom people are also derived from the Tai Ahom words. During the time of the Ahom kings, these surnames were assigned to the people with the same designation in the order of different ranks in the Ahom administrative system. Such titles were followed by a particular clan through generations, which finally led to the records of different genealogical documentations (*/boṅxawəli/* in Assamese language) by these clans. Most of the Tai Ahom words, in the course of time and due to the Assamese influence, got replaced by Assamese words. But the etymological sources remained same. For example,

Buragohain – The chief adviser to the king, also acting as the Prime Minister in the Ahom court.

Deodhai Phukan – The chief Ahom priest who performed all major rituals.

Hazarika – Chief of the infantry of a thousand soldiers.

Saikia – Chief of the infantry of a hundred soldiers.

Changmai – The chief cook in the royal palace.

Konwer – From the royal clan, especially the crown prince.

Some kinship terms of Tai Ahom words are still in use among the Ahom people. For example,

/a-pa/ ‘father’s elder sister’

/ni-sa/ ‘mother’s elder brother’

Other Tai Ahom words that are widely used in Assamese are; for instance, */burəŋji/* ‘history’, */rəŋ/* ‘color’, */kareŋ/* ‘palace’, */liksou/* ‘servant’, */hai/* ‘noise’, */jan/* ‘stream’, */saodaŋ/* ‘hangman’, */pokha/* ‘root’, etc. It is remarkable and worth mentioning that among the borrowed words in Assamese vocabulary, the Tai Ahom

words fill the place plenty.

5.4 Language and culture:

Wardhaugh (1986) mentioned,

“Every natural language not only provides its speakers with a language for talking about every other language, that is, a metalanguage, but also provides them with an entirely inadequate system for making any kinds of observations that they need to make about world.”

Tai Ahom has limited vocabulary of words; it is not an inflectional language. Hence, the only productive way for a vast stock of vocabulary is the process of compounding. This can be observed in the kinship terminology too.

5.4.1 Kinship system:

One interesting way in which people use language in daily living is to refer to various kinds of kin. It is not surprising, therefore, that there is a considerable literature on kinship terminology, describing how people in various parts of the world refer to brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts, cousins and so on.³

Kinship systems are a universal phenomenon in languages, as they play significant roles in social organism.

The intricate hierarchical society of India is reflected in its linguistic patterns and in the various terms that one uses to address and refer to different relations...in addition to the grammar, one can witness the composition, directionality and intimacy of social behavior of a speech community through kinship terms.⁴

Tai Ahom has a wide range of expressions in the kinship system. Theirs is a close-knit community of patriarchal nature.

³ Wardhaugh, 1986

⁴ Abbi, 2001

5.4.1.1 Non-affinal relations⁵:

Among the non-affinal relations (i.e., the ones an individual acquires by birth and not through any matrimonial alliance), the common terms in Tai Ahom are as follows,

a) Great grand kinsmen:

/pu-thao/ 'great grandfather (from father or mother's side)'

/ja-thao/ 'great grandmother (from father or mother's side)'

b) Grand kinsmen:

/pu/ 'grandfather (from father or mother's side)'

/ja/ 'grandmother (from father or mother's side)'

/lan/ 'grand child'

c) Parents and children:

/pɔ/ 'father'

/me/ 'mother'

/ni-sa/ 'father or mother's elder brother'

/ao/ 'father's younger brother'

/a-pa/ 'father or mother's elder sister'

/pa-mau/ 'father's younger sister'

/pa-meu/ 'mother's younger sister'

/jam/ 'third child'

/jan/ 'fourth child'

/jit/ 'sixth child'

/i/ 'youngest child'

/luk/ 'son'

/ai/ 'eldest son'

⁵ The categories are included in Abbi (2001).

/am/ 'third son'

/ŋu/ 'fifth son'

/ŋi/ 'youngest son'

/nan/ 'daughter'

/ji/ 'eldest daughter'

/et/ 'sixth daughter'

/bu/ 'seventh daughter'

d) Siblings and cousins:

/pi-sai/ 'elder brother'

/pi-nɔŋ/ 'younger brother'

/pi-nɔi/ 'youngest brother'

/pi-kai/ 'cousin brother'

/pi-ŋeŋ/ 'elder sister'

/nɔŋ-ŋeŋ/ 'youngest sister'

/nɔŋ-sao/ 'adult youngest sister'

5.4.1.2 Affinal relations:

Under this class, there are two broad divisions, one from the individual's husband's side and the other from the individual's wife's side. The familiar terms in Tai Ahom are given below.

a) Own generation:

/phu/ 'husband'

/nao/ 'wife'

/jam/ 'husband's elder brother'

/mou-pu/ 'wife's elder sister'

/dɔŋ/ 'son or daughter's father-in-law'

b) First ascending generation:

/pɔ-cao/ ‘father-in-law’

/me-cao/ ‘mother-in-law’

/a-lu-mao/ ‘elder brother’s wife’

/pi-cao/ ‘elder sister’s husband’

/pa-cao/ ‘father’s elder brother’s wife’

/khuj-cao/ ‘father’s younger brother’s wife’

/pɔ-khuj/ ‘father’s sister’s husband’

c) First descending generation:

/plao/ ‘daughter-in-law’

/khuj/ ‘son-in-law’

5.4.2 Terms and forms of address:

Abbi (2001) has categorized two kinds of address forms – a) forms used in introducing a person, and b) forms used in direct face-to-face conversation. The former type has only one direct sub-type, while the latter comprises of two sub-types – direct forms and indirect forms.

5.4.2.1 Direct address forms for introductions:

In Tai Ahom, the first name (given name) precedes the middle name and the surname (family name). The first name is preceded by an honorific (in other Indian languages, the honorific follows the first name which is preceded by a title name). However, the honorific is optional, as its occurrence depends upon the a/symmetrical relationship as well as the location of the introduction. So the sequence goes as follows –

(honorific) + first name + (middle name) + last name

It is notable that different forms of honorifics are assigned to males and females. The terms are given below.

Male - /*cao*/

Female - /*naŋ*/

In the context of a very formal situation, the honorific term /*sao-kə*/ is used which is common for addressing both males and females.

5.4.2.2 Direct address forms used in face-to-face conversation:

These are of three types in Tai Ahom – a) names, b) forms for addressing kin, and c) second person pronouns.

5.4.2.2.1 Names:

In a symmetrical relationship (i.e., relationship in which the speaker and recipient have equal status), the following patterns can be observed as the degree of intimacy increases.

/*cao*/ + first name

Last name

First name

Nickname

Regarding an asymmetrical relationship (i.e., relationship in which either the speaker or the recipient has a lower status), the following patterns are generally noticed as the degree of intimacy increases.

/*cao*/ + first name + last name

/*cao*/ + first name

In the context of an informal setup, only the first name (or sometimes, the last name) is used without the honorific /*sao*/. This honorific is not used to address someone with lower social rank or status. In such cases, only first name is addressed.

5.4.2.2.2 Forms for addressing kin:

In most of the cases, the address forms and reference forms are identical (this is familiar in most Indian languages). Regarding the non-affinal relations, younger sister and younger brother can be, and usually addressed by their first names. For addressing parents and elder siblings, the term /*ɔi*/ is added to the kinship term. For example,

/*pi-ɔi*/ 'elder sister or brother'

/*pɔ-ɔi*/ 'father'

/*me-ɔi*/ 'mother'

Among the affinal relations, 'father-in-law' (/pɔ-cao/) and 'mother-in-law' (/me-cao/) are addressed as 'father' (/pɔ/) and 'mother' (/me/), respectively (many other Indian languages also follow this). Another term for the former is /pɔ-man/, where /man/ is honorific. However, this term is not used while addressing 'mother-in-law'.

5.4.2.2.3 Second person pronouns:

Tai Ahom seems to distinguish between honorific, ordinary and intimate forms of second person pronouns just as /*a:p*/, /*tum*/ and /*tu*/ in Hindi or /*apuni*/, /*tumi*/ and /*tɔi*/ in Assamese. The honorific form of the second person pronoun is /*mou-sao*/. Regarding the ordinary and intimate forms, Tai Ahom speakers use the term /*mou*/.

5.4.2.3 Indirect address forms in conversation:

These word forms in conversation consist of verbal phrases of 'listening' type used by married women while addressing their husbands (similar as many societies in India, where married women don't address their husbands by their first or last names).

(289) /*ao-jin*/

REQ-listen

‘Please listen’

5.4.3 Terms of reference:

Such terms are used in the conversation between a speaker and a recipient, referring to a common referent that **may** or may not be present at the scene of conversation. If referent is not present, **s/he** can be referred to by the referent’s first name or various combinations thereof, **depending** upon the social variables like social status, degree of intimacy, and so on, or **by the third person pronouns**. If the referent is present at the scene of the conversation, **the social status of the referent will govern the choice of the personal pronoun**. For **example**,

When the referent is absent or not nearby,

(290) /*man-cao-nan*/

3s-HON-there

‘3s (+honorific)’

When the referent is present,

(291) /*man-cao-jai*/

3s-HON-here

‘3s (+honorific)’

In the case of more than one referent, **while referring them together**, /*man-cao*/ ‘3s (+honorific)’ is applicable, whether the referents are present or not, at the scene of conversation.

5.4.4 Forms of politeness:

Every language differs a wide **range** of options for showing politeness through its grammatical structure. Tai Ahom **demonstrates** the following,

a) Lexical terms:

Greeting words - /*khru-p-taŋ*/

Honorifics - /*cao-kɔ*/, /*cao*/, /*kɔ*/

The term /*kɔ*/ usually occurs with /*cao*/. But there are few instances where this term is seen unaccompanied by /*cao*/. For example,

/*tɔ-kɔ*/ ‘father’s best friend’

/*me-kɔ*/ ‘father’s best friend’s wife’

- (292) /*me-ɔi* *khək-kɔ* *ma* /
 mother-REF guest-HON come
 ‘O mother, guests have come’

Personal pronouns - the honorific /*cao* / is added to the second and third person pronouns.

5.4.5 Forms of request:

The request markers in Tai Ahom are /*ao* /, /*la* /, /*ta* /. It is notable that the request marker is always attached to the verb, either preceding or following it. Some examples are,

- (293) /*ao-kin* /
 REQ-eat
 ‘Please eat’

- (294) /*ba-la* /
 say-REQ
 ‘Please say (something)’

- (295) /*ma-ta* *ti* *ren* *rao* /
 come-REQ DAT house 1p
 ‘Please come to our house’

- (296) *nan-la ti-nan*
 sit-REQ there
 ‘Please sit there’

5.5 Language revival and planning:

Khubchandani (1997) states, “the notion of language development among many newly emergent nations implies the promotion of full-fledged or autonomous status for a language as an exclusive vehicle for full expression in different fields of knowledge and in all walks of life”. This is somewhat applicable to the Tai Ahom language too, as this language serves as the principal resource to the invaluable historical documents glorifying the ancient Assam including the social, economical, political and literary facets of life.

As far as the developments are concerned, the process of the revival of Tai Ahom is already on its way. The prestigious universities of Assam, especially Dibrugarh University, have come forward with many a diploma course in the endangered language keeping in view the learning of this old language so as to uncover the important but unknown historical facts of Assam, and also in a view to revive the once dominant language. There are already many publications on the spelling and grammar manuals and dictionaries of the language. Besides, some learning institutes sponsored by the government of Assam are already on the run with immense response from people. Various seminars and conferences are being held in regard to the research of the language. The old historical manuals and other books originally written in Tai Ahom are being encouraged to be translated into the state official language (Assamese) as well as in English and other languages in order to help readers get a reflective insight into the different facets of the Tai Ahom language.

5.6 Conclusion:

While explaining the case of endangerment of Tai Ahom, the issues of language shift and language change are of essential significance. A thorough description of the historical background of Assam explains particularly what led to the shift and the eventual extinction of the language. It is evident that the role of

Assamese language is crucial in the endangerment of Tai Ahom. While Assamese gradually replaced Tai Ahom both in the royal court as well as in common Assamese households, another significant factor of observation is the issue of language contact exchanged between Assamese and Tai Ahom. Even though Tai Ahom does not exist today in spoken form, there still has been its presence intact at least to some extent in the form of borrowing words found in Assamese language.

In other words, the vocabulary of Assamese language has a significant contribution from the Tai Ahom. For instance, a large number of Ahom words can be found in Assamese language including different terms for places, rivers, hills and lakes (as discussed in section 5.3). With regard to the present day scenario, the most important point in focus is that of language revival plans made by the government of Assam. There have been various language training programmes being taken up by the academic institutions of the state in their sincere attempts to revive the ancient language. Recently, a Tai institute has been established in the Sivasagar district, named as 'The Institute of Tai Studies and Research'. It not only teaches the Ahom language, but also publishes academic journals, and preserves old Ahom manuscripts in its well-organized library. In general, it is a responsible step initiated by the government to revive the old language. On a personal front, being a member from the Ahom community, it is a very special feeling to see the endangered language revive slowly but steadily.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

6.1 Brief account on Tai languages:

Historical resources (as referred in the Chinese records) point out that different Tai groups seem to have descended from 'a parent racial group'. As the parent body broke up into many groups and moved in different directions, mainly west and south-west, they carried with them the original language of their forefathers. In course of time, the groups inhabiting various regions began to appear under a variety of local names some of which had been adopted by them. As a result, the language of these groups, which was no doubt the same, was modified by local and foreign influences and appeared as distinct languages. However, the basic features of their original language with its vocabulary remained common to all the groups. Some of the common features in Tai languages are cited below.

1. Tai languages are uninflected, tonal and primarily monosyllabic in nature.
2. Presence of diphthongs and triphthongs.
3. General tones - low, high, rising and falling.
4. Tai languages are full of homophonous monosyllables which can be distinguished from one another with the application of tones.
5. Noun classifiers are common to all Tai languages.
6. Multifunctionality and compounding are common in Tai languages.
7. All Tai languages are originally from Sino-Tibetan family.
8. Mutual intelligibility among Tai languages is almost nil.

Some linguists consider Tai languages to be a separate family. However, there are different Tai language models to be found adopted by different linguists.

6.1.1 Tai language models:

Among all, **Grierson's (1903) language model** is the oldest and yet convincing.

Tibeto-Burman				
Sino-Siamese/Sino-Tai		Tibetan	Burmese	
Chinese	Tai	Tibetan	Bodo-Naga	Burmese
Old Chinese (before Christ)	Ahom Khamti	Himalayas	Kachari Garo	Kuki-Chin Kachin
Old Chinese (during Christ)	Shan Siamese/Thai		Tipra	Lolo
Middle Chinese (600-1100A.D.)	Lao			
Modern Chinese				

Robert Shafer's (1940) language model

Sino-Tibetan
Sinitic
Miao-tsza
Karenic
Tai
Tibetan or Himalayas
Bodo or Naga
Burmese, Kachin, Lolo, etc.

Paul K. Benedict's (1942) language model 1

Austro-Tai					
Indonesian	Formesan	Tai	Ong-Be	Kelao	Li
Austronesian			Kam-Sui	Lati	Laqua

Benedict's language model 2

Kadai					
Kam-Tai		Lai/Li			Kelao
Laka	Kam	Be	Tai		Lachi
Biao	Sui	Thai	Nung	Northern Zhuang	Buyang
	Maonan	Lao	Southern Zhuang	Saek	Laha
	Mulam	Shan	Tay	Bouyai	Pubiao
	Mak	Tai-Dam	Kaonan	Yay	Yerong
	Then	Tai-Keng		Mene	
		Tai-Thao			
		Ahom			

Language model by Diller et al (2008)

Tai Kadai					
Kam-Tai				Hlai	Kra
(Zhuang-Dong)				(Li)	(Geyang)
Kam-Sui	Lakjia Be	Tai		Baoding	Gelao
Kam		(Zhuang-Tai)		Tongshi	Lachi
Sui	(Northern)	(Central)	(South-	Yuanmen	Laha
Maonan	Bouyei	S. Zhuang	western)	Heitu	Buyang
Mulam	N. Zhuang	Nùng	Lue (Dai)		En
(Mulao)	Yai	Tày	Thai		Qabiao
Then	Saek	...	So. Thai		
Mak	Mène		Lanna		
Chadong	...		Lao		
...			Black, White,		
			Red Tai		
			Phu Tai		
			Shan		
			Dehong		
			Khamti		
			Phake, Aiton		

(Ahom)

The term 'Kadai' of 'Tai-Kadai' language family is Benedict's own addition. According to him, Kadai language is the amalgamation of four similar languages -

- Li of Hainan island
- Kelao of Guejou, Southern China and Yunnan province
- Laqua or Pubiao of Sino-Vietnam border
- Lati of Sino-Vietnam border

Kadai also includes the following languages -

- Laha of Vietnam and China, Lao-Kai and Chon-La provinces
- Lachi of Vietnam (Ban Diu, Ban Phung, Ban Pang, Ban Mai) and China, Yunnan (Jinguang)

However, we would like to stick to a simpler and more general language model for Tai languages as there is still lack of convincing resources.

Sino-Tibetan			
Tibeto-Burman	Sino-Siamese		
	Chinese	Tai	

6.2 Grammatical outline of the language:

The Tai Ahom language belongs to the Sino-Tibetan group of languages. It is monosyllabic and isolating in nature. Tone is phonemic in the language as it plays a crucial role in distinguishing the homophonous monosyllables from one another. However, there is still room for ambiguities regarding the exact number of tones in Tai Ahom as well as the actual usage of the tones by its speakers. As the language is monosyllabic, the multifunctional nature of its words is very significant. Word formation processes in Tai Ahom language mainly include compounding. The language is also very rich in classifiers. Various noun classifiers are added to different

words in order to expand the vocabulary. The word order of Tai Ahom language is SVO, which naturally isolates the language among its surrounding languages of Indo-Aryan and Tibeto-Burman groups. Interestingly, Tai Ahom shares the word order with Khasi, a neighboring Austro-Asiatic language.

Tai Ahom language was the royal language of the glorious Ahom kings of Assam for 600 years. Historical documents, manuscripts and other important records of ancient Assam have been preserved in this language. During the reign of the first 300 years, the Ahoms wrote books and manuscripts completely in Tai Ahom language. During the second half of their 600 year long reign, the Ahoms started writing in Assamese language as well as in Tai Ahom.

It is a matter of utter misfortune that the language is on the verge of extinction. Apart from Assamese language being the primary reason for not using Tai Ahom any longer, there are several other issues related to its status of near extinction.¹

- The language came to halt when people stopped using it
- No more linguistic as well as literary practice of the language
- Its complex tonal system made people unable to pronounce words in proper manner which actually led to misuse and misinterpretation of the language

However, the present scenario is quite promising. In a process to revive the language, Tai Ahom language is being taught at different universities and other educational institutes of Assam. The State government is involved with different organizations in order to bring out more and more Tai cultural centres to the fore front. Collective awareness among speakers of a language is really important. Because, only this can save dying languages from vanishing unknowingly from the world.

6.3 On vanishing languages:

One of the most amazing facts about languages is that there are more than 6000 languages spoken in the world. However, at the same time, it is disappointing to note that languages are dying every day. It is estimated that about one half of these

¹ Buragohain, 1999

6000 languages may be extinct by the end of this century. It is unfortunate to see languages disappearing every moment. It is remarkable that the death of languages is most noticeable in parts of the world where large numbers of languages are concentrated in a few small geographical regions. India is a perfect example of multilingual communities. However, what makes the feature of multilingual ethnicity unique and distinguished among others is the fact that languages are maintained here with only a little amount of it being the victim of the case of language death.

There has been very little research on what happens when a language begins to die. There can be several reasons attributed to the language death. The process of language death depends on how long there has been contact between the users of the language and their more powerful neighbors. In the case of Tai Ahom, it was the development of Assamese language that resulted in the disappearance of the Ahom language from its daily usage in the royal court as well as the common household to become a language merely used by a few hundreds of Ahom people from its priestly community. However, there is still hope of a revival of the Tai Ahom language due to its historical importance. When an endangered language is spoken in a culture whose historical significance is widely appreciated, it most possibly provokes widespread concern. The revival of the Ahom language is a good example of it. Being the language of the royal court of Assam during the Ahom reign, the Tai Ahom language was widely used as the written medium of all historical texts and manuscripts of ancient Assam. Therefore, revival of the language is more important as well as relevant for historians in order to explore the golden era of the Ahom kings.

Preserving an endangered language is to preserve a culture as a language represents the cultural identity of an individual or a community. Language loss is equivalent to knowledge loss, which is irretrievable. Therefore, any sincere attempt to preserve our endangered language(s) is our fundamental responsibility as well as duty towards developing integrity of our linguistic community.

Appendices

Appendix A: IPA Chart of Tai Ahom consonants and vowels

a) Consonants:

	Bila			Alve			P		V			Gl
	vl	vl.asp	vd	vl	vl.as	vd	vl	vd	vl	vl.asp	vd	vl
Plosive	p	ph	b	t	th	d	c	ɟ	k	kh		
Nasal			m			n		ɲ			ŋ	
Trill						r						
Fricative				s								h
Lateral approximant						l						

b) Vowels:

	Front	Central	Back
Close	i		u
Close-mid	e		o
Open-mid			ɔ
Open	a		

c) Diacritics:

Labialised	<i>k^w</i>
Palatalized	<i>tʰ</i>

Name: Ranju Saikia

Age: 51

Languages known: Assamese, Tai Ahom, Hindi

Place: Simaluguri, Sivasagar

Name: Ranjan Rajkonwer

Age: 71

Languages known: Assamese, English, Tai Ahom, Hindi

Place: Simaluguri, Sivasagar

Name: Babul Phukan

Age: 25

Languages known: Assamese, English, Hindi, Tai Ahom

Place: Patsaku, Sivasagar

Name: Lakheswar Gogoi

Age: 48

Languages known: Assamese, Tai Ahom, Hindi

Place: Ramugaon, Sivasagar

Name: Benudhar Borgohain

Age: 62

Languages known: Assamese, Tai Ahom, Hindi

Place: Patsaku, Sivasagar

Name: Rajib Borah

Age: 27

Languages known: Assamese, English, Hindi, Tai Ahom

Place: Patsaku, Sivasagar

Name: Ruby Bailung

Age: 25

Languages known: Assamese, English, Hindi, Tai Ahom

Place: Patsaku, Sivasagar

Name: Brajen Lahon

Age: 34

Languages known: Assamese, Hindi, Tai Ahom

Place: Simaluguri, Sivasagar

Name: Pranjal Hatibaruah

Age: 28

Languages known: Assamese, English, Hindi, Tai Ahom

Place: Bokota, Sivasagar

Name: Raktim Baruah

Age: 24

Languages known: Assamese, English, Hindi, Tai Ahom

Place: Simaluguri, Sivasagar

Name: Aradhana Saikia

Age: 25

Languages known: Assamese, English, Hindi, Tai Ahom

Place: Simaluguri, Sivasagar

Name: Ranju Paniphukan

Age: 34

Languages known: Assamese, Hindi, Tai Ahom

Place: Patsaku, Sivasagar

Name: Labanya Buragohain

Age: 26

Languages known: Assamese, English, Hindi, Tai Ahom

Place: Patsaku, Sivasagar

Name: Baikuntha Phukan

Age: 35

Languages known: Assamese, Hindi, English, Tai Ahom

Place: Nemuguri, Sivasagar

Name: Chengmun Deudhai Phukan

Age: 25

Languages known: Assamese, English, Hindi, Tai Ahom

Place: Patsaku, Sivasagar

Name: Nabajyoti Rajkonwer

Age: 33

Languages known: Assamese, Hindi, English, Tai Ahom

Place: Patsaku, Sivasagar

Name: Chitrlekha Hatibaruah

Age: 29

Languages known: Assamese, English, Hindi, Tai Ahom

Place: Patsaku, Sivasagar

Name: Kalyan Kamini Neog

Age: 37

Languages known: Assamese, Hindi, Tai Ahom

Place: Simaluguri, Sivasagar

Name: Hemanta Kumar Saikia

Age: 34

Languages known: Assamese, Hindi, Tai Ahom

Place: Simaluguri, Sivasagar

Name: Priyanka Gogoi

Age: 24

Languages known: Assamese, English, Hindi, Tai Ahom

Place: Ramugaon, Sivasagar

Name: Tanmay Borgohain

Age: 28

Languages known: Assamese, English, Hindi, Tai Ahom

Place: Bokota, Sivasagar

Name: Chaosing Saikia

Age: 30

Languages known: Assamese, English, Hindi, Tai Ahom

Place: Ramugaon, Sivasagar

Name: Hemendra Bailung

Age: 37

Languages known: Assamese, Tai Ahom

Place: Tengapukhuri, Sivasagar

Name: Anjana Lahon

Age: 39

Languages known: Assamese, English, Hindi, Tai Ahom

Place: Tengapukhuri, Sivasagar

Name: Dulen Hatimuria

Age: 32

Languages known: Assamese, Hindi, Tai Ahom

Place: Mejenga, Sivasagar

Name: Bandana Rajkumari

Age: 47

Languages known: Assamese, English, Tai Ahom, Hindi

Place: Bokota, Sivasagar

Name: Madan Phukan

Age: 51

Languages known: Assamese, Tai Ahom

Place: Patsaku, Sivasagar

Name: Anil Kumar Gogoi

Age: 56

Languages known: Assamese, Tai Ahom, Hindi

Place: Simaluguri, Sivasagar

Name: Basanta Barpatragohain

Age: 39

Languages known: Assamese, Tai Ahom, Hindi

Place: Nemuguri, Sivasagar

Group B: (speakers from the priestly class)

Name: Biswa Phukan

Age: 80+

Languages known: Assamese, Tai Ahom

Place: Tengapukhuri, Sivasagar

Name: Harbeswar Hatibaruah

Age: 67

Languages known: Assamese, Tai Ahom

Place: Patsaku, Sivasagar

Name: Bimal Barpatragohain

Age: 81

Languages known: Assamese, Tai Ahom, English

Place: Simaluguri, Sivasagar

Name: Ratneswar Phukan

Age: 53

Languages known: Assamese, Tai Ahom, Hindi

Place: Simaluguri, Sivasagar

Name: Dayananda Deudhai Phukan

Age: 59

Languages known: Assamese, Tai Ahom

Place: Patsaku, Sivasagar

Name: Dambarudhar Paniphukan

Age: 56

Languages known: Assamese, Tai Ahom, English

Place: Patsaku, Sivasagar

Name: Hareswar Deudhai Phukan

Age: 62

Languages known: Assamese, Tai Ahom

Place: Patsaku, Sivasagar

Appendix D: Days and months according to Ahom calendar

Days:

ban 'day' *ta naŋ nuŋ* 'Sunday' *ta naŋ la* 'Monday'

aŋ ka 'Tuesday' *put thu* 'Wednesday'

ka sap te 'Thursday' *sək ka* 'Friday' *sa ni* 'Saturday'

Months:

din 'month' *din kam* 'January' *din sam* 'February'

din si 'March' *din ha* 'April' *din ruk* 'May'

din sit 'June' *din pet* 'July' *din kao* 'August'

din sip 'September' *din sip it* 'October'

din sip sɔŋ 'November' *din siŋ* 'December'

Appendix E: A textual transcription

/paŋ kai-nam/

story hen-water

The story of a Waterfowl

/mu kən ti baŋ leŋ kon phan kə leŋ ju kao
 time good LOC village one man poor CL one live near
kon mak phu leŋ jao/
 man rich CL one PST

/kon phan ne luk ti kon mak khao put leŋ ku
 man poor NOM ABL place man rich paddy CL one borrow
ao kã jao/
 take GO PST

/kon mak ne jən pək lai/
 man rich NOM ask return COME

/kon phan ne ban-khao mou bak
 man poor NOM paddy 2s CL
leŋ to ta-sai jao/
 one fight eagle-eyed PST

/bab dai-sai si kon phan ne tai jao/
 NEG repay NF man poor NOM die PST

/kon phan ne tai si/
 man poor NOM die PERF

/sat na kã pin nuk kai-nam/
 next birth GO become CL water-hen

/ju ti heu nɔŋ leŋ jaɔ/
 live LOC paddy lake one PST

/kon mi mak kɔ ceu-man-keɪ ti khao nan
 man also rich CL keep in mind NF paddy that
tai kã pin nuk kai-nam/
 die GO become CL water-hen

/ju heu nɔŋ kao kan jaɔ/
 live paddy lake near begin PST

/khao-si thup mu-neu kɔ
 remember come in contact whenever then
nuk kai-nam mi mak ne iu ba put put put/
 CL water-hen also rich NOM shout say CL (reduplicated sound)

/nai ŋin si nuk kai-nam phan ne kɔ iu tɔp
 this hear NF CL water-hen poor NOM also shout reply
ba bak bak bak/
 say CL (reduplicated sound)

/naŋ nai saŋ tu leŋ iu sam tu
 CL this if CL one shout and CL
nan kɔ iu tɔp/
 that begin shout reply

/kan-nan-kan khaŋ ca ca
 quarrel with each other excite make noise (reduplicated sound)
to ban nai jaɔ/
 fight day this PST

The complete story goes as following:

In old days, one poor man lived near a rich man in a village. The poor man borrowed a basketful of paddy from the rich man. The rich man asked to return. The poor man said to the eagle-eyed rich man, “Your handful of paddy will be returned”. But he died before returning it.

The dead poor man became a waterfowl in the next birth and lived near a pond. The rich man also remembering the unreturned paddy died and became a waterfowl and lived near the same pond. Whenever the rich waterfowl remembered the borrowed paddy, it yelled, “Put, Put, Put (a basketful, a basketful, a basketful)”. Hearing it, the poor waterfowl immediately replied, “wak, wak, wak (a handful, a handful, a handful)”. Thus if one cries, the other replies immediately yelling and quarreling, making the place full of noise. It continues even to this day.

Appendix F: Basic word list

abuse	<i>lo</i>
air	<i>rao</i>
all	<i>uk</i>
and	<i>an</i>
animal	<i>tu</i>
ant	<i>mat</i>
ashes	<i>ŋe</i>
at	<i>ka</i>
back	<i>laŋ</i>
bad	<i>ma ni</i>
banana	<i>kup</i>
bangle	<i>beŋ</i>
bark	<i>be</i>
bathe	<i>ap</i>
bazaar	<i>hat</i>
because	<i>pu</i>
begin	<i>kan</i>
behind	<i>ka laŋ</i>
belly	<i>təŋ</i>
big	<i>luŋ</i>
bird	<i>nuk</i>
bite	<i>kap</i>
black	<i>dam</i>
blind	<i>but</i>
blood	<i>let</i>
blow	<i>pao</i>
bone	<i>duk</i>
book	<i>lik</i>
brass	<i>təŋ</i>
breast	<i>uŋ ceu</i>
breathe	<i>bəŋ</i>
burn	<i>tam</i>
butterfly	<i>miŋ bi</i>
cat	<i>mleu</i>
child	<i>luk</i>

chilli	<i>ma phit</i>
cloth	<i>kham</i>
cloud	<i>mək</i>
cold	<i>khrai nam</i>
cold	<i>jin</i>
come	<i>ma</i>
cook	<i>taŋ</i>
corpse	<i>tiu</i>
costly	<i>nak</i>
count	<i>an</i>
cow	<i>hu</i>
crow	<i>nuk ka</i>
cry	<i>iu</i>
cut	<i>kha</i>
daily	<i>ku mu ku ban</i>
dance	<i>ka</i>
day	<i>ban</i>
deaf	<i>nuk</i>
die	<i>tai</i>
dig	<i>khut</i>
dirty	<i>si</i>
dog	<i>ma</i>
door	<i>pat tu</i>
down	<i>teu</i>
drink	<i>klin</i>
drizzle	<i>phɔŋ</i>
dry	<i>hep</i>
dust	<i>phrug din</i>
ear	<i>pik</i>
earring	<i>kep</i>
earth	<i>teu</i>
eat	<i>kin</i>
egg	<i>mlɔn</i>
eight	<i>pet</i>
elephant	<i>caŋ</i>

end	<i>ip</i>
enemy	<i>lan</i>
eye	<i>ta</i>
eye-brow	<i>nɔŋ ta</i>
fall	<i>kan</i>
far	<i>ni</i>
farmer	<i>kon na kin</i>
fat	<i>kju</i>
father	<i>pɔ</i>
fear	<i>ku</i>
feather	<i>pik</i>
feed	<i>ɔi</i>
fever	<i>cip</i>
few	<i>cut</i>
fight	<i>to</i>
finger	<i>niu</i>
fire	<i>phai</i>
fish	<i>pla</i>
five	<i>ha</i>
flesh	<i>nu</i>
float	<i>kum</i>
flow	<i>puk</i>
flower	<i>blok</i>
fly	<i>phuj</i>
fog	<i>muj</i>
foot	<i>tin</i>
forest	<i>then</i>
four	<i>si</i>
front of	<i>an</i>
fruit	<i>mak</i>

full	<i>am</i>
garlic	<i>nɔ</i>
give	<i>heu</i>
goat	<i>pe ŋa</i>
God	<i>phra</i>
goddess	<i>naŋ rai</i>
gold	<i>kham</i>
good	<i>kɔn</i>
grass	<i>ŋa</i>
green	<i>sɔm</i>
hair	<i>phrum</i>
half	<i>ka phrɔŋ</i>
hand	<i>mu</i>
hard	<i>kat</i>
he	<i>man</i>
head	<i>ru</i>
hear	<i>thɔm</i>
heart	<i>ru uk ceu</i>
heavy	<i>nak</i>
here	<i>ti nai</i>
high	<i>suj</i>
hold	<i>kim</i>
honey	<i>phreŋ</i>
horn	<i>kɔk</i>
hot	<i>thum</i>
house	<i>ren</i>
how	<i>ki</i>
husband	<i>phu</i>
I	<i>kao</i>
if	<i>saŋ</i>
ill	<i>u ca</i>
iron	<i>lik</i>
itch	<i>khrum</i>
king	<i>khun</i>
knee	<i>ru khao</i>

know	<i>saŋ</i>
lake	<i>nɔŋ</i>
language	<i>khɔm</i>
laugh	<i>khru</i>
lazy	<i>khan</i>
leaf	<i>baɔ</i>
leftside	<i>pa sai</i>
letter	<i>ci</i>
lie(down)	<i>hi</i>
lion	<i>seŋ luŋ</i>
lips	<i>phriŋ sup</i>
liquor	<i>buj</i>
live	<i>ju</i>
liver	<i>tap</i>
lonely	<i>ram</i>
long	<i>ri</i>
louse	<i>rao</i>
love	<i>peŋ</i>
maize	<i>mak khao pha</i>
man	<i>kon</i>
mango	<i>mak mə mɔŋ</i>
many	<i>nam</i>
medicine	<i>ja</i>
milk	<i>nam cu</i>
mirror	<i>man</i>
monkey	<i>la liŋ</i>
moon	<i>den</i>
mosquito	<i>juŋ</i>
mountain	<i>doi</i>
mouth	<i>sup</i>
nail	<i>lip</i>
name	<i>cu</i>
narrow	<i>khip</i>
near	<i>phriŋ</i>
neck	<i>khɔ</i>

necklace	<i>pha lai leŋ han kho hɔ</i>
new	<i>mou</i>
night	<i>khen</i>
nose	<i>daŋ</i>
not	<i>bu</i>
oil	<i>nam man</i>
old	<i>mak</i>
one	<i>leŋ</i>
other	<i>sa</i>
pain	<i>ka</i>
peacock	<i>nuk juŋ</i>
pig	<i>kik</i>
pond	<i>khrum</i>
potato	<i>man kla</i>
pull	<i>tan</i>
push	<i>tik</i>
rain	<i>phun</i>
read	<i>son</i>
red	<i>deŋ</i>
rice	<i>mam</i>
rice(raw)	<i>khao san</i>
rightside	<i>pa kha</i>
river	<i>khen</i>
road	<i>taŋ</i>
root	<i>kɔn tun</i>
rope	<i>sai</i>
rotten	<i>pup</i>
round	<i>kap</i>
rub	<i>klen</i>
run	<i>jun</i>

salt	<i>klu</i>
sand	<i>sai</i>
say	<i>pɔ</i>
scratch	<i>ɲao</i>
sea	<i>la la</i>
see	<i>han</i>
seed	<i>huɲ</i>
sell	<i>khrai</i>
seven	<i>cit</i>
sew	<i>nem</i>
sharp	<i>phai</i>
sheep	<i>tu ciŋ</i>
short	<i>lut</i>
silver	<i>ŋen</i>
sing	<i>e</i>
sit	<i>ten</i>
skin	<i>naŋ</i>
sky	<i>pha</i>
sleep	<i>ŋop</i>
small	<i>nɔi</i>
smell	<i>bɔn</i>
snake	<i>kuŋ</i>
some	<i>ka phrɔŋ</i>
sparrow	<i>nuk cak</i>
spear	<i>rɔk</i>
spices	<i>khao phi</i>
split	<i>phup</i>
spoon	<i>cɔ</i>
stand	<i>lut</i>
star	<i>dao</i>
stick	<i>tao</i>
stone	<i>pha</i>
straight	<i>su su</i>
suck	<i>nut</i>
sugar	<i>nam ɔi</i>

sugarcane	<i>oi</i>
sun	<i>ban</i>
swell	<i>kliŋ</i>
swim	<i>lɔŋ</i>
tail	<i>raŋ</i>
take	<i>ao</i>
tea	<i>nam niŋ</i>
teach	<i>sun</i>
that	<i>an nan</i>
there	<i>ti nan</i>
thick	<i>na</i>
thin	<i>neŋ</i>
think	<i>kɔ</i>
thirst	<i>tɔm</i>
this	<i>i u</i>
three	<i>sam</i>
throw	<i>nup</i>
thumb	<i>niu thao</i>
tie	<i>khɔt</i>
tongue	<i>li</i>
tooth	<i>khriu</i>
tree	<i>tun</i>
turmeric	<i>min</i>
upside down	<i>khrum</i>
village	<i>ban</i>
vomit	<i>ɔk</i>
walk	<i>le</i>
war	<i>kon</i>
warm	<i>un</i>
wash	<i>suk</i>
water	<i>nam</i>
we	<i>rao</i>
weave	<i>tok</i>
well	<i>nam mɔ</i>
wet	<i>khru</i>

what	<i>ka saŋ</i>
wheat	<i>phak phai can</i>
when	<i>phreu nai</i>
where	<i>ka lao</i>
white	<i>nu</i>
who	<i>phreu</i>
wide	<i>kaŋ</i>
wind	<i>lum</i>
wipe	<i>lot</i>
with	<i>taŋ</i>
woman	<i>kon mi</i>
wood	<i>mai</i>
worm	<i>ku</i>
worship	<i>klɔŋ</i>
write	<i>khrai</i>
year	<i>pi</i>
young	<i>ɔn</i>

Appendix G: Basic sentence list

Simple

(1) /*hu kiñ ja* /
 cow eat grass
 ‘Cows eat grass’

(2) /*hu ne kiñ blək u* /
 cow NOM eat flower CON
 ‘That cow is eating flowers’

(3) /*man kã ti kat* /
 3s go LOC market
 ‘S/he goes to the market’

(4) /*luk-nan-phu rai si* /
 child-that-CL die PERF
 ‘That child died’

(5) /*cao-luñkham ma jao* /
 HON-Lungkham come PST
 ‘Sir Lungkham came’

(6) /*khəm saŋ pu tak lao* /
 advice know grand father FUT say
 ‘Grandfather will speak of his advice’

Negatives

(1) /*kon rao puk doi bao dai koi* /
 man 1p climb mountain NEG can PERF
 ‘Our men could not climb the mountain’

- (2) /cu bao kiñ na /
 tiger NEG eat grass
 ‘The tiger does not eat grass’

- (3) /man bab pin ju jeŋ tai /
 3s NEG become be female Tai
 ‘She is not a Tai woman’

- (4) /khao kao saŋ hañ jao /
 3p 1s NEG see PST
 ‘I did not see them’

Imperatives

- (1) /ku mu ku ban ap nam ta /
 everyday bathe water IMP
 ‘Bathe everyday’

- (2) /kã ta /
 go IMP
 ‘Go’

- (3) /mou ma na :
 2s come IMP+REQ
 ‘(I request you) please come’

Conditional and coordination

- (1) /saŋ man ma ka sam kao kɔ tak kã /
 if 3s come PERF then 1s also FUT go
 ‘If he comes, then I will also go’

- (2) /saŋ ba mou jaŋ ren
 if NEG 2s have house
 sam ju ren kao /
 then stay house 1s
 ‘If you don’t have a house, then (you can) stay at my house’

- (3) /mã̃n rəŋ hai sam kon-phu
 3s shout loudly but man-CL
 kə bab ma /
 all NEG come
 ‘He shouted loudly but no one came’

- (4) /ao lik sam paĩ ti hɔ sən lik /
 take book and go LOC school
 ‘Take the books and go to school’

Interrogatives

- (1) /cu mou ka-saŋ /
 name 2s what
 ‘What is your name?’
- (2) /phreu ma ma /
 who come come
 ‘Who else is coming?’
- (3) /an-neu mou la /
 which one 2s want
 ‘Which one do you want?’

- (4) /*luk se nai ma* /
 ABL what this get
 ‘What did you get this from?’
- (5) /*mou tak paĩ no* /
 2s FUT go CONF
 ‘You will go, won’t you?’

Cases

- (1) /*hu kiñ ja* /
 cow eat grass
 ‘Cows eat grass’
- (2) /*kao mai ram han jao* /
 1s OBJ Ram see PST
 ‘Ram saw me’
- (3) /*man ao khan pha phun* /
 3s INS axe tear apart firewood
 ‘He is cutting firewood with an axe’
- (4) /*man ma lup po man* /
 3s come INS father 3s
 ‘He has come with his father’
- (5) /*man kon phan mai hau khao* /
 3s man poor DAT give paddy
 ‘He gives paddy to poor people’
- (6) /*man luk ti ce huŋ ma* /
 3s ABL place Gargaon come

'He has come from Gargaon'

- (7) /*muj dam jaŋ ti ce doi* /
 maidam be LOC Charaideo
 (tombs of the
 Ahom kings)

'There are maidams¹ at Charaideo'

- (8) /*lik mou* /
 book 2s

'Your book'

- (9) /*luk man jaŋ si ko* /
 child 3s be four CL

'He has four children'

- (10) /*lan-kham ha* /
 grand child-gold VOC
 'O' grand children'

Comparative

- (1) /*ren nai di se ren nan u* /
 house this good COMP house that CON
 'This house is better than that house'

- (2) /*man la kha baŋ mai khej di taŋ mut* /
 3s be boy village OBJ COMP good SUP
 'He is the best among all village boys'

Classifiers

¹ Burial place for Ahom kings and royal families.

- (1) /*ku keŋ-ru*
CL earring
'a pair of ear-rings'
- (2) /*saŋ-me tu*
elephant-FG CL
'the female elephant'
- (3) /*kon sɔŋ kon* /
man two CL
'two men'
- (4) /*hɔ khao* /
CL rice
'a small packet of rice/curry'
- (5) /*tun kuŋ* /
CL banana
'a banana tree'
- (6) /*pɔŋ kham sai leŋ* /
bead gold CL one
'a string of golden necklace'

Reduplication

- (1) /*kin lai lai* /
eat slowly
'Eat slowly'
- (2) /*ma nai leŋ kai kai* /
horse this run quickly
'This horse runs quickly'

- (3) /pai hai ju jin jin /
 NEG shout stay calmly
 ‘Do not shout, stay calmly’

Non-finite verbs

- (1) /man kin̄ khao jao si tak kã /
 3s eat rice PST CP FUT go
 ‘He will go after having eaten rice’

- (2) /ban̄ tuk si kɔi man kã jao /
 sun fall CP PERF 3s go PST
 ‘He went after the falling of the sun (sunset)’

- (3) /jɔn si klu tok-leŋ dai ɔ /
 ask CP salt CL-one get PERF
 ‘(I) have got a bundle of salt after asking (for it)’

- (4) /kao han̄ mou tai pɔ ɲu /
 1s see 2s kill NF snake
 ‘I saw you killing the snake’

Modal verbs

- (1) /man phək dai khəm tai /
 3s speak can language Tai
 ‘He can speak Tai language’

- (2) /mu thuk man-cao pin ju ti ti phau /
 tomorrow 3s-HON may stay LOC Dibrugarh
 ‘Maybe he will stay in Dibrugarh tomorrow’

- (3) /*kon thao mai thuk nək* /
 man old OBJ should respect
 ‘Elderly men should be respected’

Explicator compound verbs

- (1) /*ma-tu tai le* /
 dog-CL kill WALK
 ‘The dog has been killed’
- (2) /*luk-peŋ jun kǎ u* /
 child-FG run GO CON
 ‘The girl keeps on running’
- (3) /*phu-peŋ ti dai rai si kəi* /
 man-FG must have die BREAK PERF
 ‘The woman must have died’

Appendix H: Tai Ahom Questionnaire

Phonology:

Articulatory description

Position of vowels and consonants

Suprasegmentals - glides etc, tones

Syllabic structures

Morphology:

Nouns

Examples of compound nouns of different types

Give the gender and number markers of Tai Ahom

Pronouns

Personal, reflexive, reciprocals, possessive, relative pronouns (along with person, number, proximity, gender, kinship status)

Give the case markers of the language with examples

Adjectives

Position of adjectives in a phrase/sentence structure

Types of adjectives

How is comparison made in Tai Ahom? The marker for comparison

Adverbs: examples with types and ordering

Numerals/quantifiers

Classifiers: types with examples

Verbs

Verb forms - order of construction

Tense - their distinctions

Aspect

Compound morphology

Different word formation processes

Syntax:

Sentence types

Does the language make any difference between **direct speech** and **quoted speech**? If so, how is this indicated?

How are the different types of **interrogative sentence** marked?

WH-questions

What elements of the sentence can be questioned?

Which are the constituents of the **main clause** and **subordinate clauses**?

Which are the constituents of the **noun phrases**?

Which are the elements of the **prepositional phrases**?

Which are the elements of the **coordinate structures**?

Is it possible to question more than one **thing in a sentence**? If so, which combinations from above are possible?

Position of the questioned element(s)

No change

Moved to initial position

Moved to preverbal position

Echo questions

WH (e.g. I'm going to the harbor

Where?

To the harbor)

Can all elements in the sentence be subject to **echo questioning**?

Forms of minimum answer

Yes, no, maybe etc.

How are different types of **imperative sentence** marked?

Any positive special imperative form?

In what person-number combination is it possible?

Any negative special imperative form?

Person-number combinations?

Any different degrees of imperative for both positive and negative?

Subordination

Are there any general markers of subordination

Word order, particles, verb modification

Noun clauses

Any general marker?

Different types of noun clauses

How are indirect statements, commands, questions marked?

Any of above clause non-finite?

Which verbal categories are lost and which are retained?

How is the verb made non-finite?

Any change in the arguments?

Any morphological material inserted?

Are nominalizations marked by a special word order?

Adjective clause

How are they marked?

Any distinction between restrictive and non-restrictive clauses?

Position of the head noun

After/before/in-between the relative clause

Is the element in the relative clause corresponding to the head noun/replaced by a personal or relative pronoun, or deleted?

Do headless relative clauses occur? (e.g. I saw what he wanted)

What elements can be relativized?

Adverb clauses

Types - time, manner, purpose, cause, **condition**, result, degree (comparative, equative)

How are they marked?

Can they be made non-finite?

Internal structure of sentence

Simple sentences

Overt be-copula: optional/obligatory

How is the predicate noun marked?

Order of the constituents

Is there different type of copula? Be/become

Verbal sentences

Are there verbs without subjects/direct objects?

Noun phrases

Types of modifier

Adjective

Relative clauses

Possessive/demonstrative adjective

Article

Quantifiers

Adverbials

Emphatic words

Comparative/superlative/equative structures

Coordination - and/but/or etc.

Negation - negation elements and their positions

Anaphora

Reflexives/reciprocals

Comparison

Possession - difference between alienable/inalienable

Topic, focus

Adverbials

Types of adverbs

Cases of noun phrases

Adjective phrases

Adjectives that occur in subject-less sentences?

Adjectives with direct/indirect objects?

Order of constituents

Minor sentence types

Sociolinguistics:

Kinship terminology, body parts, etc.

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