Typical Tibeto-Burman Syntactic Features

Illustrated with Boro

Categories

Categories

"Categories" -- the labels which we apply to linguistic forms:

Parts of speech or "lexical categories" like noun, verb

Functional categories like grammatical role, case, tense, aspect, and members of those categories, like subject, nominative, past tense, perfective aspect

The Dream of Universal Categories

Noun, Verb, Adjective, Adposition

===

Adverb, Conjunction, Determiner, Classifier, etc.

etc. ?

How to do basic description

Simple-minded elicitation: questionnaires & checklists

More sophisticated elicitation: constructed scenarios, experimental methods, controlled elicitation

Collect and analyze texts

How to do basic description

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You don't.

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You don't.

So don't rely on simple-minded elicitation.

How to do basic description

Here are three phenomena which are very common in Tibeto-Burman languages

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Here are three phenomena which are very common in TB languages of NE India.

They are probably there in the language you want to describe.

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Here are three phenomena which are very common in TB languages of NE India.

They are probably there in the language you want to describe.

You will not find them by eliciting from a questionnaire.

How to do basic description

Adverbial suffixes on verbs

Discourse particles

Differential case marking

How to do basic description

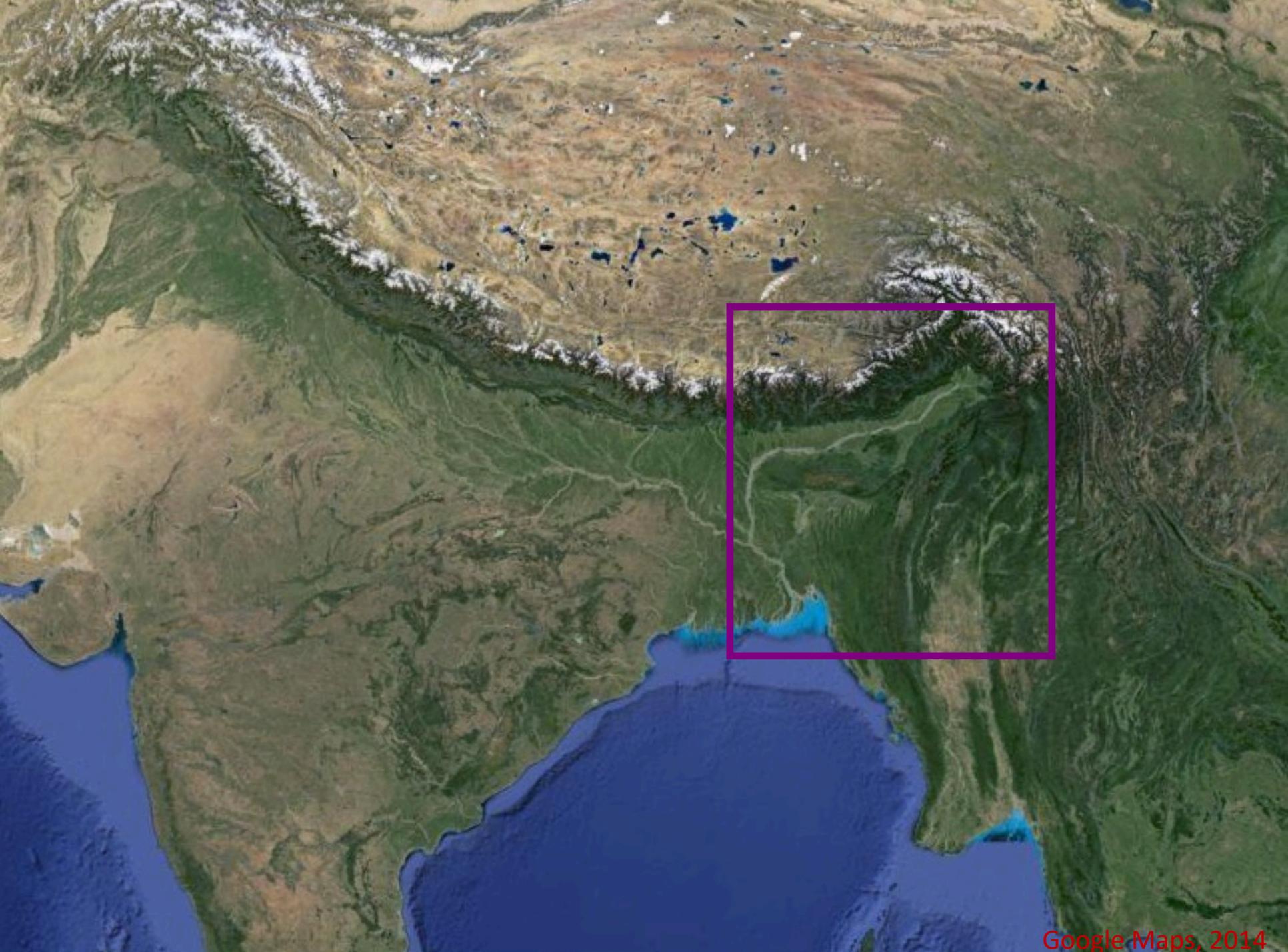Whatever methods you use, be sure and look for these:

Adverbial suffixes on verbs

Discourse particles

Non-canonical alignment patterns

      Differential case marking

      Hierarchical verb agreement

NE India

The Bodo-Garo languages of NE India

Bodo (Boro)

- About 1,000,000 speakers
- Mostly in Assam (India), a few in Nepal and Bangladesh
- "Scheduled" (official) language of India
- One of the official languages of Assam State
- 1,000 years ago the dominant language of the Brahmaputra Valley

At Upendra Nath Academy, Bodoland

Some Features of Bodo

- Adverbial suffixes

- Differential case marking

- Discourse particles

Adverbial Suffixes

These are common in languages of Northeast India

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They certainly exist in many languages where they have not been described. Always look for them.

Adverbial suffixes in Bodo

mwider-a   *bi-swr-khou*   *sigi-nanwi*   *hor-ou*
elephant-SU   3-PL-ACC   frighten-NF   night-LOC

hẃ-khár-hór-phin-gar-dwng
drive-MOT-DIST-REPT-REGRET-RLS

'The elephant frightened them in the night and drove them away again unfortunately.' (Boro and Basumatary 2015)

Adverbial suffixes in Bodo

hẃ-khár-hór-phin-gar-dwng
drive-MOT-DIST-REPT-REGRET-RLS

'drove them away again unfortunately'

	as lexical verb	as adverbial suffix
khár	'run'	MOTION
hór	'send to somebody'	DISTAL
phin	'reply'	AGAIN
gar	'discard'	REGRETTABLY
dwng	'exist, reside'	REALIZED

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Adverbial suffixes in Bodo

dán 'cut'

dán-la	'cut casually, aimlessly, without purpose'
dán-phai	'cut down'
dán-bre	'cut repeatedly so as to mark up or deface'
dán-so	'cut into pieces (as, wood into smaller lengths)'
dán-khao	'split along an axis (as, a length of bamboo)'
dán-sliŋ	'cut diagonally, on a slant'

Adverbial suffixes in Bodo

dán 'cut'

dán-khlai	'cut down, cut and make fall (as, a tree)'
dán-phle	'cut into small pieces'
dán-khw	'cut upwards'
dán-spi	'trim, cut to make neat'
dán-thar	'kill by cutting, stab to death'
dán-sri	'cut the leaves off a branch'
dán-khlab	'chip off, cut a chip out of wood'

-der '一起的，负面的'

nwŋ bizẃŋ zodernaŋa

nwŋ   bi-zẃŋ   zo-der-naŋ-a

2SG   3SG-与   坐-**DER**-需要-NEG

'You mustn't sit with him.' (for fear of some negative consequence)

'你最好不要跟他坐在一起.'(担心带来什么负面的后果)

-der '一起的，负面的'

*bi aŋzwŋ zo**der**phwidwŋmwn*

- *bi   aŋ-zwŋ   zo-**der**-phwi-dwŋ-mwn*

他   我-与   坐-**DER**-来-ʀᴇᴀʟɪs-ᴘᴀsᴛ

- 'He came and sat with me.' (which I did not want)
- '他过来坐在我身边.'(而我不喜欢)

-der '一起的，负面的'

*nwŋ bi-zẃŋ   zo-**der***

你   他-与   sit-DER

- 'Sit with him.' (so that you can do something bad to him)
- '你坐在他旁边.' (为了害他)

-der vs. *-pha*

*nwŋ be-zẃŋ   zo-**pha***

你 他-与　　坐-一起

- 'Sit with him'
- '你坐在他旁边.'

Differential Object Marking

da   ***bihamzw***   *gwzan-ni*   *pharai*

Now daughter.in.law   afar-GEN   from

nai-na-nwi   *lai-gwn*

see-NONFINAL   bring-FUTURE

'Now [they wanted] to get a daughter-in-law
    from far away.'

biha   *bihamzw-**khw***   *laiw-nanwi*
Their   d.i.l-**obj**   bring-NONFINAL

nókhora   *birat dhoni*   *za-bai*
family   very wealthy become-PERFECT

'After getting their daughter-in-law, the family became very wealthy.'

Differential Case Marking

Subject and Object marking

bihamzw-a   dorza-khw kheng-na   hwi-bai

d.i.l-SUBJ   door-OBJ   open-NF   go-
    PERF

'The daughter-in-law went and opened the
    door.'

Differential Subject Marking

ua   *mwn-se-lo*   *bi-ha*   *zekhai-wu*

bamboo   CL-one-only s/he-POSS fishtrap-LOC

wthi-bai   *tha-yw*

climb-PERF   stay-REALIS

'Only a bamboo (root) climbed into her fishtrap.'

Differential Subject Marking

bi   *ua mura-**ya**-nw*

that bamboo root-**SUBJ**-FOC

aŋ-dw   *uthi-kha-w*

I-with   climb-??-REALIS

'Only that bamboo root keeps climbing in to me.'

Differential Object Marking

*da **bihamzw** gwzan-niphrai nai-nanwi lai-gwn*

Now d.in.law afar-from see-NF bring-FUT

'Now they looked for a daughter-in-law from far
   away'

Differential Object Marking

lai-nanwi **be** **bihamzw-a-bw** *birat*

bring-NF that d.i.l.-SUBJ-ADDITIVE very

lwkhiban *manswi*

lucky person

'[They] having brought [her], that daughter-in-law was a very lucky person.'

Differential Object Marking

bi-ha **bihamzw-khw** *lai-w-nanwi*

they-的 daughter.in.law-OBJ bring-REALIS-NF

nókhor-a   birat dhoni   za-bai

family-SUBJ   very wealthy become-PERF

'Having brought their daughter-in-law, the family became very wealthy.'

Differential Object Marking

sibin *lai-thaŋ-di* *wndw-nw*

sesame bring-go-IMPERATIVE tell-REALIS

bi phiswu-a

that grandchild-SUBJ

The grandchild told [him] "Go get some sesame."

Differential Object Marking

w ***sibin-khw*** *ba* *má* *buŋ-w*

OK sesame-OBJ as.for what say-REALIS

'OK, how do you say "sesame"?'

Discourse Particles

Discourse Particles

*bi   ua   mura-ya=**nw**   aŋ-dw*

that bamboo root- SUBJ=FOC I -with

*uthi-kha-w   ná-ya=**nw**   uthi-thar-a*

climb-surely-REALIS fish-SUBJ=FOCUS climb-keep-
   NEG

'Only that bamboo root comes to me, fish don't
   come at all.'

Discourse Particles

-nw is a FOCUS particle. Here it marks the contrast between the subjects of two clauses, and the contrast with the speaker's expectation.

'Only this *bamboo* comes into my fishtrap, *fish* don't come at all!'

*ekka   khompothi-a-**bw** lap-lap   wthi-bai*

really property-SU-ALSO INTENSIFIER grow-PERF

*mwsou guli-a-**bw**   goŋ-nwi za-lai-laŋ-bai*

cow   cowshed-SUBJ-ALSO CL-two   happen-get-take-PERF

They really flourished. [Their] property also grew. Their cowsheds also doubled. (*Treasure*)

Discourse Particles

-*bw* is ADDITIVE particle. Here we could say that it shows that there is no contrast – *property* increased, and *cowsheds* also.

Discourse Particles

bi   nwŋ-sw,   nwŋ-ni mohor-sw

that   you-XX,   you-GEN   image-XX

'That is you, your image.'

Discourse Particles

-sw corrects a mistaken assumption on the part of the hearer. I don't know any standard term for it.

In this example, the addressee thinks that she will find a picture of her husband's new girlfriend. Instead she finds a mirror, which is something she has never seen before.