An Anthropo- Linguistic Study on Clan Formation of Toto of Totopara in West Bengal

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Abstract

The paper focuses on the linguistic anthropological characteristics of the Clan system of Toto. Apart from the description of the clans the paper discusses a few morphological properties of the lexical items related to clans. Toto is one of the smallest indigenous people of Alipurduar district in the state of West Bengal, India. The community members interact in their own language which is called Toto but do not have any written literature or a script. In terms of the population, Toto is one of the smallest language communities in our country. A linguistic anthropological survey was conducted among all the households of the Totopara village of Alipurduar district of west Bengal with the help of structured and open-ended questionnaire schedules. The Totos are divided into thirteen clans like /boŋ-go-bei/, /boudʰubei/, /budʰubei/, /ɖɑnkɔbei/, /moŋto-bei/ etc. These clans are patrilineal and totemic. The tribe is endogamous in nature but strictly follows clan exogamy. The member of each clan respects their clan totem that is inevitably non-human in nature. From the data, it is evident that the clan names belong to fauna semantic domain. However, use of a single entity as two different clan names can be observed as the following: • ɖɑnʈrɔ-be Elephant • dʰiringʧɔnkɔ-be Elephant • nurinʧɑnko-be Elephant The clan names end with the suffix -be or –bei to indicate genericness. a. lɑnkɑiʤi-be 'Snake' b. moŋto-bei 'White goat' Generally, the clan names in Toto have descended through the male line i.e. from father to son. The community believes that its relation with these totemic objects is mysterious. Unmarried daughters may retain their father's clan till their marriage. Married women are found to imbibe the clan names of their husbands belonging to different clans. Some of the clans are reported to split up into different number of sub-clans.

Keywords: clan, morphology, linguistics, anthropo-linguistics, totem, Toto.

Introduction

The Toto are an indigenous people of about 1387 people inhabiting in Totopara, Alipurduar district of West Bengal (census, 2011). Linguistically, they are of Tibeto-Burman origin. The Toto follow certain traditions of totemism. Totemism, still forms the fundamental feature of their social organization in so far as kinship, marriage, and relations of the sexes. For purposes of exogamy, the whole tribe is divided in to a number of clans or *gotras*. Totems could be as many as there are animate objects. However, in this paper we have trying to understand about the Toto clan formation through the linguistic anthropological aspects. Linguistic anthropology is one of the four fields of anthropology. It is the study of world languages and the application of linguistics to anthropology. Linguistic anthropologists are concerned with how language influences culture.

On the other hand Clan is a group of people united by actual or perceived kinship and descent (Chisholm, 1911). The kinship-based bonds may be symbolic, whereby the clan shares a "stipulated" common ancestor that is a symbol of the clan's unity. When this "ancestor" is non-human, it is referred to as a totem, which is frequently an animate or non-animate object. In the field ethno-botanists have recorded that tribal and other folk living in remote forest areas depend largely for their daily needs of food, fuel, herbs, materials for making their dwellings, tools and implements, and feed for their animals, etc. Based on their intuition and creativity, they have devised several ways to save the natural resources from wanton damage and to conserve the bio-resources. These indigenous ways include faith, taboos, avoidance, and also totemism such as naming their clans after plants, animals and certain articles of urgent daily needs like salt (Tirkey & Jain, 1989). The tribals of a particular clan maintain special relationship and affinity with the animals or plants on whose name their clan name is based. They do not cause any harm to these animals or damage to these plants and try to maintain, and enhance their population. Some such plants and animals are considered as sacred. Many of the animals and plants whose

names have become associated with clan names are even otherwise economically significant (Jain, 1991). The main objectives of this study are to know clan among the Toto on the basis of linguistics and anthropological aspects, to know the meaning and domain of clan totem and taboos as well as to illustrate morphological properties of the clans in Toto.

Methodology
This study is based on the direct intensive observation and interviews with the members of Toto community of Totopara. A linguistic anthropological survey was conducted among all the households of the Totopara village of Alipurduar district of west Bengal with the help of structured and open-ended questionnaire schedules. The qualitative information regarding the activities like marriage, taboo and totem of the clan were collected through repeated conversations. And the secondary data were collected from various journal papers, books as well as internet archives.   The qualitative data have been descried through the descriptive way and quantitative data have been presented with the help of table and diagrams. Raw data (Clan's name) have been presented through the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA).

Location of the Study area
Totopara is a unique and isolated habitation situated on the Indo-Bhutan border at an elevation of approximately 2,000 feet above sea level. This high-altitude location contributes to its distinct ecological and climatic conditions.

Distance and Accessibility: Totopara is 21 kilometers from Madarihat, a town in the Alipurduar district of West Bengal, India. The journey to Totopara can be challenging due to its remote location. For about half of the year, the area is cut off due to heavy monsoon rains. The nearby **Hawri River** floods during this period, making travel to and from Totopara difficult.

Surrounding Features: Totopara is bordered by several notable geographical features:
  a.   **To the North**: Tading Village in Bhutan and the Kalikhola orange orchard.
  b.   **To the South**: Titi Forest in Jalpaiguri district, which contributes to the region's rich biodiversity.
  c.   **To the East:** The Torsa River, which acts as a significant natural boundary.
  d.   **To the West:** The Bhutan Mountains and the forests of the Duars region, which provide a scenic and natural barrier.

Demographics and Settlement

Size and Layout: The Toto habitation covers an area of approximately 1,996.96 acres. This sizeable area indicates a relatively spacious settlement, though the actual habitable area might be smaller due to the rugged terrain and natural features surrounding it.

Inhabitants: Totopara is primarily inhabited by the Toto community, who live in a single village within this area. The village has a diverse demographic makeup, reflecting a mix of different ethnic and linguistic groups:
Nepali Families: A significant number of Nepali families began settling in the area in the 1950s. Their presence indicates historical migration patterns and the blending of cultures.
Other Communities: In addition to the Nepali population, Totopara also hosts members of several other communities:
Garo: An indigenous community with distinct cultural practices.
Mech: Another local ethnic group.
Oraon: A tribal group with a unique cultural heritage.
Bengali, Marwari, and Eastern Hindi Speakers: These groups represent the broader linguistic and cultural diversity of the region.

Cultural and Environmental Context

Seclusion and Isolation: The seclusion of Totopara, especially during the monsoon season, has helped preserve its traditional ways of life and limited external influences. This isolation contributes to the Toto community's distinct cultural identity and practices.

Ecological Significance: The surrounding forests, rivers, and mountains not only define the geographical boundaries of Totopara but also influence the local climate and biodiversity. The area's rich flora and fauna are

integral to the Toto's traditional practices and daily life.

Totopara is a secluded and culturally rich village located at the Indo-Bhutan border, surrounded by diverse natural features such as the Hawri River, Torsa River, Bhutan Mountains, and various forests. Despite its isolation, Totopara hosts a diverse population, including the indigenous Toto community and various other ethnic groups. The village's geographical remoteness and the seasonal flooding of the Hawri River contribute to its unique way of life and cultural preservation.

The Toto
Location and Administrative Context:

➢ **Geographical Setting**: The Toto tribe lives in a small, isolated village located at the foothills of the Bhutanese Himalayas. This village falls within the administrative jurisdiction of the Alipurduar district, specifically in the Madarihat Block. The Toto's settlement is strategically situated in a region that is both geographically and culturally distinct, adding to their unique heritage.

➢ **Primitive Tribal Group Status**: In 1975, the Government of India officially recognized the Toto tribe as a Primitive Tribal Group (PTG). This designation is given to certain tribal communities who are considered to be vulnerable and have retained a significant degree of isolation from mainstream society. The recognition reflects their distinct way of life and the need for special attention to their socio-economic development.

Cultural Characteristics

1. **Animist Beliefs**: The Toto are fundamentally animists, meaning their religious and spiritual practices are centered around the belief in spirits inhabiting natural objects and environments. Their animist practices are deeply intertwined with their daily life, rituals, and worldview.
2. **Homogeneous Community**: The Toto are a relatively homogeneous tribal group, sharing a common language, culture, and territory. Their cultural practices, including their language and rituals, are specific to their community and contribute to their distinct identity.
3. **Traditional Economy**: Historically, the Toto engaged in various subsistence activities:

   a) **Jhum Cultivation**: This refers to shifting agriculture, a method where land is cleared, cultivated for a few years, and then left to regenerate while the cultivators move to a new plot.
   b) **Hunting**: Hunting was a significant part of their subsistence strategy, providing food and other materials.
   c) **Copper Collecting**: The Toto also practiced copper collection, which was a vital economic activity in their traditional economy.

Historical and Migration Theories

Origins and Migration: There are theories suggesting that the Toto might have migrated from the adjacent hills of Bhutan. This migration theory links their current settlement to their historical movements and interactions with neighboring regions.

Ethno-Tourism and Modern Influences

1. **Emergence of Ethno-Tourism**: Totopara has increasingly become a site of ethno-tourism. Ethno-tourism involves visiting communities to learn about their traditional cultures and ways of life. This trend has introduced outsiders to the Toto's unique cultural practices and has resulted in a blend of traditional and modern influences.
2. **Impact on Social Fabric**: The influx of tourists and external interactions has significantly impacted the Toto community. Some of the changes include:

a) **Economic Changes**: Traditional livelihoods have been influenced by new economic opportunities brought by tourism. While tourism has provided additional income, it has also led to shifts in traditional economic practices.

b) **Social Changes**: The exposure to external cultures and ideas has led to changes in the Toto's social structure and practices. Modern advertisements and cultural exchanges have begun to alter their traditional way of life.

c) **Cultural Changes**: As modern society's influences penetrate Totopara, there is a risk of cultural erosion, where traditional practices may be replaced or modified under the pressure of external influences.

The Toto tribe, with their rich animistic traditions and homogenous cultural identity, represents a unique part of India's tribal heritage. Their traditional practices of shifting agriculture, hunting, and copper collection are integral to their way of life. However, the growth of ethno-tourism and external interactions have brought significant changes to their social fabric and economic activities. While these changes offer new opportunities, they also challenge the preservation of their traditional culture and way of life.

Toto Clans

The Totos are divided into thirteen clans like *Budubei, Baudhubei, Dankobei, Dantrobei, Nubebei, Mangchingbei, Linkaijibei, Diringchancobei, Mankobei, Bangobei, Pisichankobei, Nurinchankobei*, and *Mantrobei*. These clans are patrilineal, totemic. This tribe is endogamous in nature but strictly follows clan exogamy. The member of each clan shows their respect to their respective clan totem that is inevitably non-human in nature. Animal, birds, fish, trees, flowers or even inanimate objects might be their clan totems. The clan name descends through the male line i.e. from father to sons. They believed in a mysterious relation with these totemic objects. Unmarried daughters may retain their father's clan till their marriage. Married women are found to imbibe the clan names of their husbands belonging to different clans. Some the clans are reported to split up into number of sub-clans.

The Totos are endogamous tribe and strictly follow clan exogamy. Marriage within the same clan is strictly prohibited. There are 13 numbers of clans and each clan is permitted to marry different clans. This equation is fixed. For example, Dantrobei can marry with Bangobei, Dankobei, Nurinchankobei, Buddhubei and Boudhubei. Some pairs of clans are considered fraternal; hence arrange between Nubeibei and Manchingbei or marriage between Bangobei and lenkaijibei cannot be executed. In this context one point should be mentioned here that marriage between two fraternal clans is possible only after seven generation. Cross cousin marriage of both type are preferred though parallel cousin marriage is strictly prohibited.

The member of each clan shows their respect to their respective clan totem that is inevitably non-human in nature. Basically animals might be their clan totems. Like, /boŋgo-bei/ (red cow), /boudʰu-bei/ (white cow), /budʰu-bei/ (tiger), /ɖankɔ-bei/ (red hourse), /moŋto-bei/ (white goat), etc.

Table 1 Clan and Totem of Toto Community

Clans*	Totem	Domain
boŋ-go-bei	Red Cow	animate
boudʰubei	White Cow	animate
budʰubei	Tiger	animate
ɖankɔbei	Red hourse	animate
ɖanʈrɔbe	Elephant	animate
dʰiringt͡ʃɔnkɔbe	Elephant	animate
lankaid͡ʒibe	Snake	animate
moŋco-bei	Red dog/ red buffalo	animate
mand͡ʒingbe	Monkey	animate
nubibe	Elephant	animate

| nurint͡ʃankobe	Elephant	animate
piʃit͡ʃankobe	Red hourse	animate
moŋto-bei	White goat	animate

Clan names written in IPA

From the data, it is evident that the clan names belong to fauna semantic domain. However, use of a single entity as two different clan names can be observed as the same totem. Like, nubibe (elephant), nurint͡ʃankobe (elephant).

Morphological Aspects

In linguistics, morphology is the study of words, how they are formed and their relationship to other words, such as stems, root words, prefixes, and suffixes. Morphology also looks at part of speech, intonation and stress, and the ways context can change a word's pronunciation and meaning. Among the thirteen clans all the clan may have suffixes of */be/* or */bei/* to indicate genericness. The meaning of the */bei/* (/boŋ-go-bei/ , /boudʰu-bei/, /budʰu-bei/, / moŋco-bei/ etc) in Toto language *gotro* (clan). On the otherhand if we have consider the morphological break of the Toto clans, we can see the following structure

Eg. [moŋto-bei], [moŋco-bei]
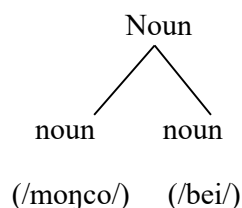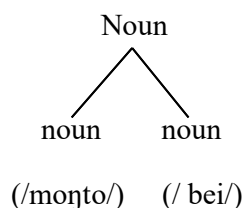
From the above two examples we can see two morphemes (noun) consist of one word (noun). Morpheme is the smallest unit of meaning of a word. The Toto clans are the free morpheme in nature. Because /moŋto/ means 'taking' and /bei/ means 'gotro'/ 'clan' in their own language. But the clan /moŋto-bei/ totem is 'white goat'.

Conclusion

Clan Names and Semantic Domain

1. **Fauna Semantic Domain**: The clan names of the Toto tribe primarily fall within the **fauna semantic domain**, meaning they are derived from the names of animals. This reflects the totemic nature of their clan system, where animals are often revered and symbolically represent different clans.

2. **Multiple Names for Single Entity**: In the Toto language, it is noted that a single animal can have multiple clan names. For example:
   a) **/ɖanʈrɔ-be/** and **/dʰiringt͡ʃɔnkɔ-be/** both refer to the elephant. This illustrates that different expressions or variations of the same animal can be used to denote different clans, perhaps based on regional or dialectal differences within the Toto community.

Suffixes Indicating Genericness

1. **Suffix -be or -bei**: The suffixes **-be** or **-bei** are used in Toto clan names to indicate **genericness**. This means that the suffix helps categorize the clan names under a broad category, generally referring to the type of animal or object. For example:
   a) **/lankaid͡ʒi-be/** translates to 'Snake'.
   b) **/moŋto-be/** translates to 'White goat'.

These suffixes help in distinguishing between the specific clan names and their broader category (i.e., animal or object).

Inheritance Patterns

1. **Patrilineal Descent**: Traditionally, Toto clan names are passed down through the male line, from father to son. This means that the clan identity and its associated totem are inherited through the paternal lineage, reinforcing the patrilineal structure of Toto society.
2. **Role of Unmarried Daughters**: Unmarried daughters retain their father's clan name until they marry. This practice signifies the importance of the father's clan in a woman's identity while she is single.
3. **Marriage and Clan Names**: Upon marriage, women typically adopt the clan name of their husbands. This change reflects the new social and familial affiliations established through marriage. As a result, married women belong to the clan of their husband, which may be different from their natal clan.

Sub-Clans and Clan Splits

- **Formation of Sub-Clans**: Some Toto clans are reported to split into several sub-clans. This means that a single main clan might further diversify into smaller, distinct groups. These sub-clans might have their own specific totems or variations of the main totem, leading to greater granularity within the clan system.

  Example: If the main clan name is associated with the elephant, there might be various sub-clans each with different aspects or interpretations of the elephant, possibly reflecting different roles, attributes, or local variations within the tribe.

However, the Toto tribe's clan naming system is deeply rooted in their animistic and totemic beliefs, with clan names primarily derived from animals. The suffixes **-be** or **-bei** serve to categorize these names generically. Clan names are inherited patrilineally, but women change their clan affiliation upon marriage. The system allows for the formation of sub-clans, indicating a dynamic and complex social structure within the Toto community. This system reflects their intricate relationship with the natural world and their cultural practices surrounding kinship and identity.

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