

REPORT ON THE 2ND ANNUAL MEETING OF THE NORTH EAST INDIA LINGUISTIC SOCIETY, GUWAHATI, ASSAM, INDIA, 5-9 FEBRUARY 2007

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Following the success of the inaugural meeting of the North East India Linguistic Society (NEILS) in 2006, scholars from across India, France, the Netherlands, Australia and the United States gathered in Guwahati, Assam, for NEILS 2. The conference, jointly organized by Gauhati University Department of Linguistics and scholars from the Research Centre for Linguistic Typology (RCLT) at La Trobe University consisted of two days of workshops (February 5-6) at Gauhati University's Linguistics Department and three days of talks (February 7-9) at the newly-inaugurated Don Bosco Institute in Guwahati's Kharghuli Hills area.

NEILS is the only forum devoted to discussion of North East India's diverse collection of languages, comprising languages from Tibeto-Burman, Indo-Aryan, Tai-Kadai, Austroasiatic and Dravidian families. The founders of NEILS share an aim to ground analysis in a rich and natural source of data. The combination of the North East's diversity and the focus on natural data were mirrored in the conference presentations.

The workshops, held at Gauhati University, were geared toward fieldwork and its applications within the North East. A presentation by Erik Andvik focused on orthography development, highlighting some of the possible problems and solutions with creating writing systems, and Shobha Satyanath facilitated a workshop on field methodologies and data collection. François Jacquesson focused his workshop on disyllabic compounds in languages of North East India and the surrounding area. A presentation by filmmaker Moji Riba of Rajiv Gandhi University,

Arunachal Pradesh, discussed the importance of film documentation and its applications to cultural-linguistic documentation during the current age of rapid transition in North East India.

After the workshops, three days of papers followed, with no parallel sessions allowing the approximately fifty participants to attend all the talks. Like the first meeting of NEILS, the papers were representative of the diversity of North East India, including papers on Tai Phake, Khasi, Nagamese, Assamese and a number of Tibeto-Burman languages. In addition to papers analyzing linguistic phenomena in these languages and many others, papers were also presented on such topics as the linguistic relations among the Bodo-Garo languages (François Jaquesson), the use of Hindi as a *lingua franca* in Arunachal Pradesh (Yankee Modi), and the role of language in construction of Assamese identity (Uddipan Dutta). A few papers also broadened the geographic scope of the conference by presenting data from the nearby Burmese language K'cho (George Bedell and Kee Shein Mang) and discussing number-building in Tibeto-Burman languages in general (Martine Mazaudon).

The Don Bosco Institute was an ideal location for the conference. The main room for talks provided a dramatic view of the Brahmaputra river. Participants stayed in the Don Bosco Institute's newly finished rooms and also took meals and tea there, encouraging stimulating conversation at all hours. Following the second day of talks the conference took a lighter note as participants enjoyed a cultural excursion – a boat journey down the Brahmaputra river with tea, songs, and a beautiful sunset.

On the last day of the conference, Dr. Rajesh Sachdeva, Deputy Director of the Central Institute of Indian Languages (CIIL), announced plans for the upcoming New Linguistic Survey of India (NLSI). CIIL, in conjunction with the Ministry of Human Resources Development, the University Grants Commission and the local community of linguists, have proposed an extensive, ambitious linguistic survey of the entire country. The NLSI will be the first survey of the country's languages since Grierson's work over a hundred years ago. The main objectives of the NLSI are to identify the geographical distribution and to prepare descriptions of each language spoken in India. Language descriptions will take the form of phoneme charts, grammatical descriptions and

dictionaries. It is expected that audio and video recordings exemplifying the languages in their various socio-cultural contexts, texts such as folklore, and written materials with translations will also be produced and archived as a result of the NLSI. As academics and teachers are recognizing the importance of mother tongue education, the NLSI is also committed to the creation of literacy materials. Other objectives, such as genetic relationships between languages, were also mentioned. The project has been broken down into numerous stages, to be carried out over a ten year period. Dr. Sachdeva affirmed the commitment of CIIL to involve western scholars who were already working on India's languages and encouraged linguists to be in touch with CIIL with questions and comments regarding the upcoming survey.

Plans for a third NEILS conference are in the works and it is anticipated that the next conference will be in February 2008, also in Guwahati. The organizers of NEILS also announced that a peer-reviewed volume of selected papers from the first meeting of NEILS will shortly be published by Foundation Books, the Indian imprint of Cambridge University Press (to be distributed overseas by CUP), and that they intended to publish a volume of articles from NEILS 2 as well. Information regarding NEILS can also be obtained at the following website: <<http://www.latrobe.edu.au/rclt/Neils/Neils.htm>>.

