

**REVIEW OF *THE LANGUAGE OF THE MODHUPUR MANDI (GARO)*
VOL. I: GRAMMAR, BY ROBBINS BURLING**

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The Language of the Modhupur Mandi (Garo). Vol. I: Grammar.
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Robbins Burling (henceforth B) is a distinguished example of the species known as “anthropological linguists”, to which Paul K. Benedict also belonged.¹ B’s involvement with Bodo-Garo language and culture dates from the 1950’s, and at this moment (April, 2008) he is actually off doing fieldwork on still another language of this group, Dimasa. During the course of his decades-long work with Garo, B has obviously acquired considerable fluency in the language, although he emphasizes throughout this grammar (henceforth LMM) that he is still far from having native intuitions about difficult points:

There is still much that I do not know about the language, but when my description butts up against the limits of my knowledge I have done my best to say so (p. 7).

I will state as much as I know or suspect, and try to make the limits of my knowledge clear (p. 58).

Directing of attention, and the organization of information into old and new must be involved, but it may take a linguist with native competence to do justice to the subtleties (p. 307).

Despite such modest disclaimers, LMM is an impressively detailed, insightful, and well-written grammar, certainly one of the best produced to date for any TB language of the Northeast India/Bangladesh region.²

LMM is Volume I of a three-volume set. Vol. II (*The Lexicon*, xii + 457 pp.) is a collection of Mandi words arranged by semantic categories like a thesaurus; Vol. III (Glossary, vii + 232 pp.) is an alphabetical list of the Mandi words and affixes found in Vols. I and II. As indicated in LMM p. xi, Volumes II and III are

¹ Among the best known of B’s purely anthropological works are Burling 1963, 1965, and 1970. His important contributions to comparative/historical TB linguistics include Burling 1959, 1966, 1967/68, 1969, and 1983. For Benedict’s anthropological side, see Benedict 1941/2008.

² It goes far beyond B’s pioneering grammatical sketch of Garo (Burling 1961).

available in searchable form, and as a down-loadable and printable PDF file at either:

<http://name.umdl.umich.edu/bbv9808>

or

<http://www.personal.umich.edu/~rburling>

A hallmark of LMM is its user-friendliness. An innovative feature is the labelling of each section by the letters A, B, or C (corresponding roughly to elementary, intermediate, and advanced), according to the particular audience for whom the passage is intended: the general public desirous of learning the language, native Garo speakers who would appreciate a careful description of their language's grammar, or professional linguists. In a sense, LMM is as much a textbook as a technical linguistic description.³ It is a tribute to B's mastery of his subject that he succeeds to a large extent in satisfying all possible readers. So disparate is B's intended audience that he claims he can't imagine any individual actually reading the whole book through (p. 7)!⁴

Chapter I (*The Language and the People*) contains an authoritative account of Garo dialectology and nomenclature (both autonyms and exonyms). LMM focuses on the variety of Garo spoken in Bangladesh known as Modhupur Mandi, but frequent comparisons are made to the Garo of India, especially to A-chik, a dialect originally spoken in the NE corner of the Garo Hills, which has served as the basis for the missionary-introduced writing system. The complex contact situations among the various Garo dialects are discussed, as well as the bidirectional contact between Bengali and Mandi, and the growing influence of English among the more educated Garo speakers.

Chapter II (*Segmental Phonology*) covers both Mandi and to a large extent the standard dialect A-chik. The clusters /sp- st-, sk-/, where the stop is fairly strongly aspirated, are distinguished from syllables with very short vowels which B writes as /sip, sit, sik/, since the final consonants in the latter are unaspirated.⁵ On the other hand, the consonant sequences /kn-, gn-, sn-/, which Garo orthography writes as clusters, B prefers to consider as full syllables with underlying -i- between the stop and the nasal.

Mandi has five monophthongs, written /i e a o u/. /i/ furnishes a good criterion for syllabification, since it is pronounced [i] in closed syllables, but [i] elsewhere. B takes great care to separate the syllables of polysyllabic words with hyphens (p.

³ The textbook aspect of LMM is especially apparent in the Appendices. After Appendix A, consisting of four Mandi texts (the first two with interlinear English glosses), come Appendix B "Questions for Study", intended for speakers of Garo who want to broaden their understanding of how the language is organized, and Appendix C ("Glossary of Linguistic Terminology"), with definitions of such terms as *stop* and *suffix*.

⁴ I confess that I belong to this tiny group of hypothetical readers, having read every word with great pleasure over a period of several months.

⁵ English also has a contrast between clusters like /sk-/ and /sək/, as in *scum* vs. *succumb*, which now curiously seems to be breaking down in certain varieties of British English, where words like *police* and *collapse* are now pronounced /pli:s/ (to rhyme with *fleece*) and /kláps/ (homophonous with *claps*).

18), partly because consonants are pronounced differently in syllable-final vs. -initial position; but also because syllable boundaries usually correspond to morpheme boundaries.⁶ Sometimes, however, the best synchronic syllabification does violence to the historical morpheme boundary, e.g. *ra-ma* ‘road’ (p. 29, p. 52) is < PTB **lam*.⁷

Glottal stop presents intricate problems, and is discussed mostly in a long (C) section (pp. 32–42). B symbolizes [ʔ] by the convenient raised dot “.” used in the standard Garó orthography, and calls it by its Garó name *raka* “the hard one”. Syllable-final *raka* is definitely phonemic, with many minimal pairs, e.g. *ka-a* ‘tie’ vs. *ka·a* ‘bitter’⁸ (p. 24), but it does not occur word-finally. *Raka* may also appear distinctively after final nasals or -l (as in Chin languages), e.g. *ring-a* ‘drink’ vs. *ring·a* ‘sing’; *bil-a* ‘fly’ vs. *bil·a* ‘roll up’ (p. 25). There are complex rules (which differ from dialect to dialect) for deleting *raka* in final syllables, or in the second syllables of words (pp. 34–38).

Garó lacks tones, but Joseph and Burling (2001) have convincingly demonstrated that the contrast between a *raka* and its absence is cognate to the two-way tone contrast of several closely related languages (Tiwa, Boro, Rabha).

B is highly sensitive to inter- and intra-dialectal variation. Chapter IV (*Morphophonemics and Variation*), while emphasizing that Garó morphology is notable for its regularity (p. 71), also deals with a number of sporadic variational phenomena like contraction of two successive identical vowels, idiosyncratic assimilations, dialectal variation in vowels, and presence or absence of initial *h*- (pp. 74–80). As becomes clear in later chapters, B considers the many “grammatical suffixes” to be part of the same “word” as the root they modify, largely on the grounds that they cannot occur alone (p. 102), so that “Garó words have so many parts and these parts can be combined so productively that it would be impossible for a dictionary to list all the possible words in the language” (p. 308). In other words, B chooses to come down on the side of morphology rather than syntax: “Much of what other languages do by joining words is accomplished, in Garó, by joining the smaller bits into words” (p. 293). Yet B admits that the question of “what is a word?” is often a vexatious one (pp. 102–104), and that some decisions are arbitrary, e.g. the distinction between *case markers* (which are treated as part of the preceding noun) and *postpositions* (treated as separate words).⁹

⁶ For the latter reason I also use hyphens in Lahu, except for recent polysyllabic loanwords like *kāmīlī* ‘committee’. B goes further, even hyphenating monomorphemic loanwords like *po-lis* ‘police’. (Final -s only occurs in loanwords.)

⁷ The liquids are in complementary distribution, with [r-] occurring only as initial, and [l] only as final.

⁸ But in this word the glottal stop is secondary, since the syllable derives from PTB **ka*. In fact, the last element of V + ʔ + V sequences, where the V’s are the same, are often to be regarded as “echo-vowels” (p. 39), e.g. *so·ot* ‘kill’ < PTB **sat*.

⁹ In Lahu terms I would call the former “noun particles” and the latter “unrestricted particles”. B avoids the term *particle* altogether, perhaps because of his strict criterion that a real word must be capable of standing alone. Other criteria might also be brought to bear, however, including

Chapter V (*Core Grammar: an Overview*) is a simply written chapter (containing only A and B sections) intended to give a quick overview of the grammar, including a preliminary treatment of all the classes of words and suffixes to be described more fully in subsequent chapters.

The only obligatory constituent of a sentence is the verb, optionally preceded by one or more NP's, whose relationship to the verb is often signaled by postpositions. The simplest NP consists of a single noun, often with a case marker, but can also optionally include any or all of the following:

demonstrative + genitive + classifier phrase (Clf + Num) + modifying verb + case marker + postposition

The minimal VP has a *verb base* plus a *principal verb suffix*, especially *-a* 'neutral'.¹⁰ Optional constituents include adverbial affixes and terminating suffixes. These elements occur in the following order:

verb base (+ adverbial affixes) + principal verb suffix + (terminating suffixes)

In Chapter VI (*Verbs*), we are introduced to the principal verb suffixes, which besides *-a* 'neutral', include a number of other tense/aspect markers: *-jok* 'change of state', *-no(-a)* 'future', *-gen* 'future' (A·chik dialect), and *-na-jok* 'immediate or intentional future',¹¹ as well as a number of imperative suffixes (pp. 125–127). The other types of principal verb suffixes, *nominalizing* and *subordinating*, are discussed more fully in Chapters XII and XIII, respectively.

In Chapter VII (*Optional Verb Affixes*) we learn that a single verb can be followed by anywhere from zero to a half dozen adverbial affixes, and/or one or two terminal suffixes. The *adverbial affixes* are a heterogeneous class, which B divides into four subtypes, ranging from highly grammaticalized and abstract to quite specific and concrete:

- (a) *inflectional* (pp. 141–146): *-ing-* 'progressive';¹² *-ja-* 'negative'; *-ku-* 'still, yet'; *-et-* ~ *-it-* 'causative'; *-ang-* 'away'; *-ba-* 'in this direction'; *-pil(-)* 'return, reversed'; *-a-ri-* 'just, merely';
- (b) *general* (with somewhat more specific meanings; pp. 146–150): *-be-* ~ *-bi-* 'very, a lot'; *-tok-* 'all, everything'; *-grik-* 'mutually, each other', *-srang-* 'completely', *-bru-* 'falsely, pretending', etc.;
- (c) *specialized* (only semi- or even minimally productive; pp. 150–153): *-gok-* 'broken apart, separated'; *-chok-* 'pointed'; *-chrak-* 'forcefully, uncontrolled'; *-srok-* 'lightly, loosely', etc.;

permutability. English *the* has the status of a word, even though it cannot stand alone, since other words may be freely inserted between it and the noun it modifies.

¹⁰ As becomes clear in Ch. XII, *-a* is actually a nominalizer, used e.g. in citation forms of verbs, much like English *to* or Lahu *ve* (Matisoff 1972).

¹¹ This is very similar to the aspectual category marked by the Lahu verb-particle *šā* (Matisoff 1973: 352).

¹² Note the chance similarity with English, referred to on p. 71.

(d) *derivational* (the most specialized; pp. 153–154): *-jip-* ‘with fanning, flapping’ (< PTB **ya:p*); *-srip-* ‘slurp, swirl in the mouth’ (cf. WB *hrup* ‘snuff up, sniff, sup’) < PTB **m-dzup* ‘suck’, etc.

The *terminal suffixes* (pp. 154–163) include both tense/aspect and modal morphemes, e.g. *-ming* ‘past; conditional’; *-jok-ming* ‘past perfect’; *-kon* ‘perhaps, probably’; *-ma* ‘yes-no question’;¹³ *-na* ‘quotative’; *-ne* ‘polite imperative’.

Chapter VIII (*Nouns*) is a long chapter (pp. 165–211) full of well-presented information. A grammatical sentence need have no NP’s at all. The order of items before the verb can be quite free because the case markers show the syntactic and semantic role of the NP’s so clearly (p. 306); different orderings of the arguments can reflect subtle pragmatic considerations. Unlike Garo verb bases, noun bases can easily occur with no suffixes at all (p. 167). Most noun-stems are compounds. In a fine section on “noninitial morphemes in compounds” (pp. 173–178), B outlines a five-part continuum of meaningfulness for the morphemes that occur non-initially, ranging from those that can serve as independent words to those which have no recognizable existence apart from the particular words in which they occur (like the *-tril* in *nostril*, or the *cran-* in *cranberry*). Among the most interesting of these non-initial morphemes is *-ma* ~ *-bi-ma* ~ *-a-ma*, which contributes a meaning either of FEMALE or of LARGE SIZE, e.g. *a-ma* ‘mother’, *do-bi-ma* ‘hen’; *jak-si-bi-ma* ‘thumb’, *mi-ma* ‘large-grained variety of rice’; *ja-dil-ma* ‘large root’ (p. 176). The use of a “mothermorph” to express large size is in fact very widespread in East and SE Asia (and elsewhere in the world).¹⁴

Nominative nouns have no case markers (except that pronouns with monosyllabic bases always have an *-a* added to the base).¹⁵ Mandi has from 9 to 14 “cases”, depending on what criteria are used¹⁶ (pp. 181–201). No sharp line can be drawn between case markers and postpositions. The most important case markers include *-ko* ‘accusative’,¹⁷ *-na* ‘dative/benefactive’, *-ni* ‘genitive’, and *-o* ~ *-no* ‘locative’. The accusative marker is used only sparingly (e.g. for contrast or emphasis) if an indefinite direct object immediately precedes the verb. Since

¹³ Cf. Mandarin *ma* 吗. As in Mandarin and many other ST languages, the marker of yes-no questions cannot be used in the same Garo sentence as a “wh-interrogative” morpheme.

¹⁴ See Matisoff 1991, “The mother of all morphemes”.

¹⁵ B notes (pp. 172–173) that the prefix *a-* ~ *ang-* occurs in many kinship terms, with an obscure meaning. Although he feels that “*ang-* has something to do with the 1st person singular pronoun *ang-a...*”, this is actually a rather well-attested prefix in TB, with nothing to do with the 1st person pronoun. (Cf. Bisu, Phunoi, and Sangkong *an-*, Lahu *ə-*, and the discussion in HPTB: 104–111.) It seems to be a general bulk-providing prefix for nouns, sometimes deverbative, as in Lahu.

¹⁶ I avoid this issue for Lahu by calling all grammatical morphemes that occur only after nouns *noun particles* (1973: 153–67). B admits that Mandi cases are “less grammaticalized” than in a language like German, where the choice among cases depends as much on the syntax as on the meaning to be conveyed (p. 182). There is a good discussion (pp. 182–183) of different case treatments of nouns in Garo as opposed to English.

¹⁷ Cf. Burmese *kou* (Written Burmese *kui*).

Mandi has a separate dative marker, the syntax of ditransitive sentences is different than, e.g. in Lahu, where it's the indirect object that takes the accusative particle (*thàʔ*), while the direct object is unmarked:

Mandi: Bi-a ang-na cha-ko ron-a
 3p-NOM 1p-DAT tea-ACC give-NEUT/NOMZR
 ‘He gives me tea.’ (p. 188)

Lahu: Yô ɲà thàʔ là-ğì pî ve
 3p 1p ACC tea give NEUT/NOMZR

As in other TB languages, some object-verb combinations are so natural and frequent that the object seems almost to be incorporated into the verb, so that it is never marked by *-ko*, e.g. *a-bol sot-a* ‘cut firewood’, *do ra-sot-a* ‘butcher chickens’.¹⁸

Many postpositions, including the spatial ones, typically follow a noun plus genitive *-ni* (just as they follow the Lahu equivalent *ve*):

Mandi: ang-ni mik-kang -o ‘in front of me’
 1p-GEN front -LOC

Lahu: ɲà ve ð-ğû-šĩ ̄
 1p GEN front LOC

But several other postpositions follow a noun plus dative *-na* (pp. 234–236), e.g. *gan-da* ‘because of’ (*ma-su-na ganda* ‘because of the cows’). Other postpositions take locatives, or the comitative *-ming* ‘with’.

Particularly useful for showing the interrelationships among the case markers are pairs of contrastive examples. In the following sentences (p. 324), both the main verb of the sentence and the verb of the subordinate postpositional clause with *gim-in* ‘because’ have overt subjects; in such cases the former must be in the nominative and the latter in the genitive. In (a) *ang-a* is the subject of the main verb, while *ang-ni* of (b) is the genitive subject of the subordinate verb:¹⁹

(a) Ang-a, re-ang-a -ni gim-in, cha-na man-ja
 I-NOM go NOMZ GEN because eat-Inf can-NEG
 ‘I cannot eat because of (someone’s) departure.’

(b) Ang -ni re-ang-a -ni gim-in, cha-na man-ja
 I GEN go NOMZ GEN because eat-Inf can-NEG
 ‘(Someone) cannot eat because of my departure.’

The following two sentences (p. 187) have the same general meaning, but the case pattern is different:

¹⁸ Cf. Burmese “verbs with tied noun” (Okell 1969: 36–7) and Lahu “transhemistichial compounds” (Matisoff 1973: 306–15).

¹⁹ In these sentences the postposition *gim-in* ‘because of’ is preceded by a verb nominalized by *-a* (see below) and followed by the genitive marker.

- (a) Ba·ra-cha mik-kon- ko ka-tip- a
 cloth- INST eyes ACC tie on “NEUT”
 ‘(He) ties the eyes with a cloth.’
- (b) Ba·ra-ko mik-kon- o ka-tip- a
 cloth- ACC eyes LOC tie on “NEUT”
 ‘(He) ties a cloth on the eyes.’

Chapter VIII concludes with a discussion of “final noun suffixes”²⁰ and “terminal suffixes of verbs” (pp. 202–209). The final noun suffixes are *-ba* ‘also’; *-de* ‘but’; *-sa ~ -ha* ‘only’; and *-in* ‘emphatic, foregrounder’, while the terminal verb suffixes include *-ming* ‘past’, *-kon* ‘probably’, *-ma* ‘interrogative’, *-na* ‘quotative’, *-ro* ‘contradiction’ and *-ai* ‘emphatic’. B points out that these “verbal” suffixes turn up now and then suffixed to nouns, while the final “noun” suffixes occasionally find their way onto verbs (p. 207).²¹

Chapter IX (*Nominals*) deals with items other than common nouns that can take a case marker, including demonstratives, pronouns, interrogatives, proper names, modifying (i.e. nominalized/relativized) verbs, and (locative) postpositions. Among the tidbits in this chapter we learn that “demonstratives are an area...where exuberant variation is at its most extreme.” There are no fewer than 16 possible ways to pronounce ‘here’ (p. 214). As in many other languages (Lahu, Japanese), Mandi demonstratives distinguish three degrees of distance (*here, there, way over there*). There are three basic interrogative roots (*sa* ‘who?’, *mo* ‘what?’, *ba* ‘which?’), but there is much dialectal variability here as well. There is an excellent discussion of *ba*-²² and its compounds, and the overlapping relationship of *ba*- and *mo*- (pp. 223–227). *-ba* also acts a suffix in a group of words that are used in an indefinite sense in both negatives and interrogatives (pp. 274–276): *ma-ming-ba* ‘anything; nothing’; *ba-no-ba* ‘somewhere, anywhere’; *sal-sa-ba* ‘any time; never’; *sak-sa-ba* ‘nobody; anyone’.

In Chapter X (*Numerals*), B defines ‘numeral’ as a Classifier + Number. Classifiers and numbers define each other, as in Lahu, but their relative order is different: in Mandi the numeral follows the classifier, while in Loloish languages the opposite is true:

²⁰ These are discussed further on pp. 309–313. The use of these optional elements is quite subtle: “Although they are never obligatory, their absence can sometimes be stylistically awkward” (p. 203); “One’s speech would be impoverished without them, even if it would not be ungrammatical” (p. 313).

²¹ In Lahu terms, I would be tempted to lump both sets of suffixes together as “unrestricted particles”, which operate on whole clauses and can appear after either nouns or verbs (Matisoff 1973, sections 3.71, 3.9, 4.4, 5.7).

²² This morpheme is cognate to Written Burmese *bha* ‘what, which’ (*HPTB*: 488).

Mandi: man-de sak sa 'one person'
 person CLF one

Lahu: cho tê ġâ
 person one CLF

A given noun can often be used with several classifiers, since classifiers are an open class including measures, containers, aggregates, and time units, as well as several based on core semantic categories like 'people' and 'animals'. As in other TB languages, some nouns can be "auto-classified":

Mandi: song song- gin-i 'two villages'
 village CLF two

Lahu: qhâ? nî qhâ?
 village two CLF

Chapter XI (*Minor Parts of Speech*) is devoted largely to adverbial expressions, which often occur immediately before the verb, but can also occur earlier. There are scores of adverbial affixes;²³ a given VP may have a whole string of them (p. 139). They can be used in almost any combination, but their order is completely fixed.²⁴ B astutely observes that "By and large, the more common adverbial affixes come late in the word, and these later affixes can generally be used with any verb in the language. Those that occur closer to the verb base are more idiosyncratic (p. 139)."²⁵

Adverbials constitute a numerous word class, since many of them are transparently derived from verbs. Any verb can be turned into an adverb by using *-e* as the principal verb suffix,²⁶ e.g. *mik-tal-a* 'to lie on one's back' > *mik-tal-e chu-a* 'sleep lying on one's back'.

Reduplication is a pervasive Mandi process, used for a variety of semantic purposes, including plurality, distributivity, and continuation or repetition of an action. It plays a key role in adverbials of all kinds. There are several morphological subtypes, including simple one-syllable reduplication (e.g. *chrap-chrap* 'crowded together'); 3- and 4- syllable formations (e.g. *dim-prong-dim-prong* (A-B-A-B) 'with a lot of smoke; dusty'; *rik-rik-rak-rak* (A-A-B-B) 'restlessly'; *sim-dim-dim* (A-B-B) 'having a dark color'); partial (i.e. ablauting) reduplications (e.g. *gu-rung-ga-rang* 'wandering around aimlessly'); and what B calls "second and fourth syllable pairs" (pp. 265–256), e.g. *rin-ek-sin-ek* 'messy, knocked down (of growing plants)', *dil-dek-ga-dek* 'swing, wobble (e.g. bamboo

²³ See the lists in the summary of Ch. VII, above.

²⁴ It would evidently have been too complicated to present a sequence chart displaying all the adverbials in their relative order.

²⁵ In discussing possible sequences of Lahu "versatile verbs" (1973: 211–265), I use the concept of a "continuum of abstractness", whereby the more concrete verbal concepts come closer to the verb root than the more abstract ones.

²⁶ See below Ch. XIII (Subordination).

bridge, loose post)'; *chat-chi-tat-chi* 'kinsmen', *dok-a-sik-a* 'musical instruments' (*dok* 'beat', *sik* 'blow'). B does not explicitly recognize "first and third syllable pairs", but does give such examples (*ma-su-mat-e* 'cattle' (p. 101), *pil-eng-pil-ung* 'rocking back and forth, as a boat' (p. 265), *mat-cha-mat-bil* 'wild animals' (p. 179) (*mat-cha* 'tiger', *mak-bil* 'bear').²⁷

Of particular interest are a number of reduplicative or "bulk-producing" processes that B calls "echoes" and "anticipations" (p. 101, pp. 288–292). Echoes are various types of partial reduplication, with the reduplicate almost always having the same number of syllables as the root word, e.g. *pul* > *pul tul* 'flowers'; *gam-u* > *gam-u tam-u* 'work'; *al-si-a* > *al-si-a mal-si-a* 'lazy'; *rang-kan-ta chu-kan-ta* 'angry'; *kat-ru-rak kat-su-sak* 'running back and forth'. The echo adds a certain emphasis to the root word. What B calls "anticipations" often approach a sort of Pig Latin. In one type, a word is expanded by reduplicating its first syllable and putting *-de* or *-ba* between the two identical syllables, e.g. *cha-jok* 'has eaten' > *cha-de-cha-jok* 'has indeed eaten'; *nam-a* 'be good' > *nam-ba-nam-a* 'really good'.²⁸ Another anticipatory process involves repeating the first CV- of a word and adding *-n*, which conveys a sense of "thoroughness", e.g. *kat-ja* 'does not run' > *kan-kat-ja* 'does not run at all'; *ga-du-ja* 'does not climb' > *gan-ga-du-ja* 'does not climb at all'.

Chapters XII–XIV deal specifically with syntax. Chapter XII (*Complex Noun Phrases*) takes up the interrelated phenomena of nominalization and relativization, now once again hot topics in TB linguistics.

The most important Mandi nominalizing suffix is *-a*, homophonous with what B calls the "neutral tense-aspect suffix".²⁹ A verb nominalized by *-a* (or *gip-a*) can be used as a noun, taking case markers and postpositions, e.g.:

with accusative case-marker *-ko*:

Si- gip-a- ko den-na man-a
die NOMZ ACC cut-INF may-NEUT
'You may cut the dead ones.'

Ang-a bi-ni giit ring-a- ko kin-a -a
I- NOM he-GEN song sing NOMZ ACC hear NEUT
'I hear him sing(ing) songs.'

²⁷ In Lahu such four-syllable partial reduplicates, of both A-B-A-C and A-B-C-B types, are called "elaborate expressions" (Matisoff 1973: 3.39, 4.425). Speakers of all TB languages that have them seem to prize them. In Garo they are known as *ku-pa me-li-a* 'words that go well together' (p. 101) or *ka-ta jik-se* 'wife-husband words' (p. 178). In Lahu they are called *tô-vê?*, lit. "word-flowers".

²⁸ Similar "anticipations" are also possible with *-in* or *-an*, but only before negated verbs. B notes (p. 289) the curious fact that all these intercalable syllables are homophonous with the highly abstract final noun suffixes (see Ch. VIII).

²⁹ B seems to agree (p. 132) that the nominalizer and the tense/aspect suffix are really one and the same item historically. The Lahu particle *ve* shares these functions, as well as being a relativizer and genitive marker (Matisoff 1972).

with locative case-marker *-a-o*:

Ang-ni chi ring -a -o da-a ring-a
 I GEN water drink NOMZ LOC NEG IMP drink-NEUT
 ‘Don’t drink where I drink.’

As the last two examples show, when a clause that has a subject is nominalized, the subject is put into the genitive case. When locative *-o* is suffixed directly to a verb-base it has always has a temporal meaning (p. 301):

Bol den- -o chip-u dong-a -ming
 tree chop LOC NOMZ snake be at-NEUT -PAST
 ‘There was a snake when the wood was cut.’

In its relativizing function, *-a* can be suffixed to a verb in order to modify another noun:

chon-a pi-sa -rang -na ‘to the small children’
 small child PL DAT

Mandi relative clauses almost always precede their head-noun, and are marked with a nominalizer like *-gip-a*. If the RC consists of a single word it can go either before or after the head. B restricts the term RC to clauses that contain more than a single nominalized verb.³⁰ A fairly complex example (p. 299):

Me-chik-ni skang-o ru-a-cha den-gip-a
 women-GEN previously axe-INST chop-NOMZ/REL
 a-bol -cha wal su -bo
 firewood -INST fire burn -IMPV
 ‘Burn the fire with the wood that the women previously cut with the axe.’

In Chapter XIII (*Subordination*) B discusses ways that verbs can be subordinated to other verbs, i.e. verb complementation. When such subordination is overtly marked it is usually via one of two suffixes, either *-e* (or one of its fuller variants, *-e-ming-*, *-e-min-a*) or *-na* ‘infinitive; to, for, in order to’.³¹ Clauses with *-e*, *-e-ming-*, *-e-min-a* are basically adverbial:³²

³⁰ There is a good reason for this, since Mandi single-word verbal modifiers can either precede or follow their head noun, while “full RC’s” always precede their head. Similarly, Lahu RC’s generally precede their head, but if they are of simple enough structure they may follow. For discussion of the constraints on forming such “right relative clauses”, see Matisoff 1973: 490–503.

³¹ There is a very similar particle *na* in Jingpho, glossed as “infinitive mode or future tense” in Hanson 1906/1954: 458.

³² See the discussion of Ch. XI, above.

Ang-a ja-brang -e dong-jok
 I-NOM scared -SUBORD be at-PERF
 ‘I stayed in a frightened way’; ‘Frightened (though I was) I stayed.’

Sri-sri rat -e-min-a cha-jok
 in slices cut -SUBORD eat-PERF
 ‘Having cut it in slices, (they) ate.’

A verb or a whole clause may also be subordinated to another verb via the infinitive suffix *-na*, in a sort of complementary infinitive construction. A few verbs (e.g. *man* ‘be able’) “follow an earlier infinitive so closely and tightly that they might be considered to be auxiliary verbs” (p. 319):

Ang-a mi cha-na man-a
 I-NOM rice eat-INF can-NEUT
 ‘I can eat rice.’

Na can also be used to express ‘in order to, for the purpose of’:

rim-na i-ba
 work-INF come
 ‘come in order to work’

Bi-a cha-na (in-e) re-ba -ming
 he-NOM eat-INF SUBORD come PAST
 ‘He came in order to eat.’

This multifunctional morpheme also functions as the dative case marker (p. 190, p. 210),³³ as the following pair of sentences illustrate:

Ang-a chip-pu- na ken- a
 I-NOM snake DAT fear NEUT
 ‘I’m afraid of snakes.’

Ang-a jro- na ken- a
 I-NOM swim INF fear NEUT
 ‘I’m afraid to swim.’

Other types of subordinate clauses are marked by extensions of the locative/temporal morpheme *-o*: (conditional) Clause + *-o-de* ‘if Clause’; (concessive) Clause + *-o-ba* ‘although Clause’; (restrictive conditional) Clause + *-o-sa* or *-o-ha* ‘only if Clause’.

* * *

³³ See the discussion of Ch. VIII, above. Curiously English *to* also has both infinitive and dative functions.

Beyond the excellence of its description of Mande, this grammar is also important for the light it sheds on similar phenomena in other languages. Easiest to spot are similarities with other Tibeto-Burman languages. Many have already been mentioned above, but here are a few more:

Sometimes there is a morphophonemic relationship between intransitive/transitive verb pairs. In particular there are, among the dozen examples given (p. 113), three such pairs displaying the widespread TB pattern of voiced (v.i.) vs. voiceless (v.t.) initials,³⁴ undoubtedly remnants of a more pervasive system in Garo:

	<i>Intransitive</i>	<i>Transitive</i>
‘burst’	<i>bret-a</i>	<i>pret-a</i>
‘crush’	<i>bin-ek-a</i>	<i>pin-ek-a</i>
‘break (a solid object)’	<i>be-a</i>	<i>pe-a</i>

In other such pairs, the morphophonemic relationship is suppletive, as in English *fall/drop*, *die/kill*, etc.

Since Mande /i/ in closed syllables is pronounced quite far back, and since /u/ is sometimes further front than in many languages, the contrast between /i/ and /u/ is between unrounded vs. rounded rather than between front versus back (p. 27), and a number of words alternate between /i/ and /u/ (pp. 80–81). A similar allophonic phenomenon perhaps lies at the root of the common TB variational pattern of *-i-* vs. *-u-* in closed syllables.³⁵

Remnants of an earlier vigesimal system of counting are still remembered by a few older people (pp. 245–246), using the morpheme *kol*, a reflex of the general TB etymon **m-kul* ‘score; twenty’ (see HPTB: 416).

In a discussion of semantic variation among speakers (p. 84), B mentions a confusion with respect to the names of internal organs of the body, particularly between HEART and LIVER. A similar vacillation is characteristic of the Chin languages, where the Proto-Kuki-Chin root **m-luŋ* has either meaning, probably because both the heart and the liver are considered to be seats of human emotions and thought processes.³⁶

An explicit Mande way of conveying the notion of “A or B” is by means of an expression that literally means “A if-it-is-not, then B”, i.e. “if it is not A, then B” (p. 284). This is a morpheme-by-morpheme equivalent of a parallel expression in Lahu (and undoubtedly in many other TB languages):

Mande:	A	ong·-ja-	o-de	B	
		be-NEG	if		
Lahu:	A	mâ	hê?	qo	B
		NEG	be	if	

³⁴ See HPTB 2003: 89–90.

³⁵ See HPTB 2003: 493–505.

³⁶ See Matisoff 1986.

Garo uses a large number of sentence-initial expressions that act as “clausal links” translatable by ‘and’, ‘and then’, ‘so’, etc. (pp. 284–285). Along with nine native locutions (*u-ni-ko*, *i-ni-ko*, *u-ni-ko*, *i-ni-ko*, *u-ni-ku-no*, *i-ni-ku-no*, *u-ni-ku-no*, *i-ni-ku-no*, *in-di-tan*), the Mande dialect has a dozen more equivalents borrowed from Bengali.³⁷ This is very similar to the multiplicity of Lahu variants used for the same purpose: *qhe*, *le*, *qhe te*, *te le*, *qhe te le*, *qhe te le ɔ̃*, *qhe te le ɔ̃ qhe*, etc.

The 2nd singular pronoun has two variants *na-a* and *nang-* (p. 215). Both of these are actually widespread in TB.³⁸

As in any typical East or SE Asian language, Garo adjectives are to be regarded as a subclass of the verbs. They take the full range of verb suffixes, just like action verbs. There is also a small set of seven intransitive verbs with the prefix *gi-*, *gip-*, *git-* that translate English adjectives but are grammatically idiosyncratic (p. 273), in that they can all occur without a principal verb suffix: *gip-bok* ‘white’; *gi-sim* ‘black’; *git-chak* ‘red’; *git-ting* ‘raw, unripe’; *git-tang* ‘living, fresh’; *git-dal* ‘new’; *git-cham* ‘old’. Lahu has a similar set of idiosyncratic morphemes, including the basic color terms and the word for ‘new’, which have properties intermediate between those of nouns and verbs, and can all take the noun-prefix *ɔ̃-*: (*ɔ̃-*)*phu* ‘white’, (*ɔ̃-*)*nâ?* ‘black’, (*ɔ̃-*)*ni* ‘red’, (*ɔ̃-*)*ši* ‘yellow’, (*ɔ̃-*)*no* ‘blue/green’, (*ɔ̃-*)*šř* ‘new’.

One of several types of what B calls “twinned constructions” are *balanced* (i.e. disjunctive) *questions*” (pp. 338–339), in which both possible answers, positive and negative, are offered in the question, e.g.:

bi-a	re-ba	-no-a	-ma	re-ba	-ja	-no-a	-ma
she-NOM	come	FUT	QST	come	NEG	FUT	QST
‘Will she come or not?’ (“Will she come, won’t she come?”)							

This type of yes-no question is common in Sino-Tibetan languages, including Chinese and Lahu.

In the last chapter (*XIV: Restructuring*), B mentions a colloquial tendency to invert the order of major clause constituents for emphasis, or as afterthoughts, so that a NP appears after its VP, or a subordinate clause after the main one (pp. 343–345). This highly marked order, set off clearly by the intonation, is paralleled elsewhere in TB, e.g. in Lahu.³⁹

On the level of grammar-above-the-sentence, B insightfully observes (p. 316) that “A common rhetorical strategy for tying together the sentences of a discourse is to introduce a new sentence with a verb that echoes the final verb of the previous sentence but that ends with a subordinating suffix”, e.g.:

³⁷ See the discussion of Bengali contact influence, below.

³⁸ Matisoff 1994: 592–4.

³⁹ Matisoff 1973: 504–14, Capitulum VIa, “Colloquial perturbations of normal syntax”.

Ang-a	Ro-bi-bal-o	Gaira-cha	re-ang-	a-ming.	
I-NOM	Sunday-LOC	Gaira-LOC	go	NEUT-PAST	
Re-ang	-e-min-a,	Mi-jen-pa-	ming	ku-sik	a-gan-a.
go	SUBORD	Mijenpa	with	language	speak-NEUT

‘I went to Gaira on Sunday. Having gone, I spoke with Mijenpa.’

This discourse strategy is true of TB languages in general.⁴⁰

Many features of Mandi Garo grammar are shared by non-TB languages of the SE Asian linguistic area. To mention a few:

In a manner very much like Thai or Vietnamese, many Mandi compound nouns are constructed from a “category prefix” plus additional syllable(s) (pp. 168–173), e.g.:

do- ‘bird’: *do-ka* ‘crow’; *do-gu-gu* ‘wild pigeon, dove’ (cf. Thai *nók-*)
na- ‘fish’: *na-tik* ‘fresh water shrimp’; *na-cheng-bit* ‘small edible fish’
 (cf. Thai *plaa-*)
mat- (in mammal names): *mat-chok* ‘deer’; *mat-cha* ‘tiger, leopard’
bol- ‘tree’: *bol-dim-it* ‘tree with dark trunk and no heartwood’ (cf. Thai *má(a)j-*)

Passives are not prominent in Mandi, but they do exist (p. 340). As B justly observes (p. 342), a language that can omit subjects so easily has less need for a passive than one where a subject is required. Passives can be derived from active sentences by promoting a NP, most often the original direct object, to the subject, and changing its case from accusative to nominative. The original subject is demoted to an instrumental. As in other SE Asian languages, the passive in Mandi is usually *adversative*, and limited to sentences where the original object is animate.

Chau-kok	-ko	polis	dok-a	-ming
thief	ACC	police	hit-NEUT	PAST

‘The police beat the thief.’

Chau-kok	polis-cha	dok-a	man-e	cha-a	-ming
thief	police-INST	beat-NEUT	get-SUBORD	eat-NEUT	PAST

‘The thief was beaten by the police.’

A-chak	man-de-cha	dok-a	man-e	cha-	-a
dog	person-INST	beat-NEUT	get-SUBORD	eat	NEUT

‘The dog was beaten by the man.’

Interestingly, the adversative passive auxiliary is *cha-a* or *man-e cha-a* ‘eat/get to eat’, in a manner reminiscent of English “swallow a beating” and “eat humble pie”, or of Mandarin *chī kǔ* 吃苦 ‘bear hardships’, lit. “eat bitterness”.

The cogent section on “empty verbs” (pp. 118–120), now generally referred to as *light verbs*, rings a bell with general typologists as well as with SEA’n

⁴⁰ See Matisoff 1979.

grammarians. These are very common verbs with highly abstract meanings, like Mandi *dong-a* ‘be at, exist, have, there is/are’; *ong-a* ‘be, be the same as, be equivalent to, be true’; *dak-a* ‘do, perform, act, make, construct’; *man-a* ‘be able to, accomplish, achieve, manage, finish’; *rim-a* or *ka-a* ‘work, act’. This latter verb has the special job in A·chik of nativizing verbs borrowed from Bengali and English,⁴¹ e.g. *o-pe-ret ka-a* ‘to operate’. There are some examples in Mandi (*ep-lai ka-a* ‘apply’), but this is less common than in A·chik, since Mandi speakers are more comfortable in using native verbal suffixes with borrowed words, and thus have less need for an empty verb to hold the suffixes.

Many adverbials are formed with *dak-a* ‘make/do’, either (a) before a full main verb, or (b) with the empty verb functioning as the main verb of the clause:

- (a) ja· wek-wek dak-e kat-a
 leg short do-SUBORD run-NEUT
 ‘run with short legs; run in a short-legged way’
- (b) Bi-ni ha-ba jol-kep-kep dak-a,
 3rd GEN field narrow do-NEUT
 ‘His field is narrow.’ (“His field is done narrowly.”)

Possession may be indicated by *dong-a*, with the possessor marked by the locative *-o*:

Ang -o -to-ra dong -ja
 1p LOC basket be there NEG
 ‘I have no basket.’

This same construction appears all over the world, e.g. in Hebrew and Russian.⁴²

* * *

B is careful to note the many points of contact between Mandi Garo and Bengali. Besides those already mentioned, some of the most interesting include the following:

A number of case-markers and postpositions have been borrowed from Bengali, e.g. *a-ge* ‘before; ago’, *po-re* ‘after’, *lo-ge* ‘together with’, *por-jun-to* ‘as long as; until’ (pp. 240–242).

Mandi of Bangladesh uses mostly Bengali numerals, though A·chik uses purely Garo numerals up to 999 (p. 244).

Although nouns can be conjoined by simple juxtaposition, Mandi can optionally use the *-ba* suffix after both nouns (*na-a-ba ang-a-ba* ‘both you and I’), or the comitative suffix *-ming* ‘with; together’, also used after both

⁴¹ Similar functions are performed by Japanese *suru*, Nepali *gar-nu*, and Turkish *etmek*.

⁴² Cf. Hebrew *yesh li sefer* ‘I have a book’ (“There is to me a book”), *eyn li sefer* ‘I don’t have a book’ (“There lacks to me a book”).

conjoiners (*mi-ming ja-ba-ming* ‘both rice and curry’). Alternatively the Bengali conjunction *ar* may be used between the two nouns (*chi-ni ar hol-di-ko* ‘sugar and turmeric’), but not after the second one (pp. 281–285).⁴³

Bengali influence is strong even in interjections (pp. 279–280), with such items as *at-cha* ‘OK; good’; *bap-a-ri-bap*, *ba-ba*, *o-ba-ba* ‘my gosh, wow!’ in common use.

B surmises that “Quite possibly the entire process of echoing was borrowed from Bengali”, even though it is now very well established in Mandi (p. 291).

The indefinite “relative-correlative construction” (pp. 333–338), where successive clauses are marked by *je* and *u-a*, appears definitely to have been borrowed from Bengali, e.g.:

Je man-de cha-a-ming, *u-a* man-de-in ring-a-ming
 person eat-NEUT-PAST person EMPH drink-NEUT-PAST
 ‘Whatever person ate, that person drank.’

Nevertheless, Bengali/Mandi influence was evidently not totally unidirectional. B feels that certain features of Bengali and Assamese, especially numeral classifiers, may actually be due to TB contact (p. 85). These Indo-Aryan languages are unusual in having any numeral classifiers at all, though their systems are quite impoverished when compared to that of Mandi. Bengali only has two classifiers: *-jon* ‘for people’, and *-ta* ‘for almost any other physical object’ (pp. 255–256).

The influence of English on Garo dialects is growing, but seems rather marginal so far. Nowadays A·chik speakers always use English when giving telephone numbers, Bengali numbers for clock time, and their own native numbers for most other purposes. In a sociolinguistically perceptive section on “courtesy expressions” (pp. 276–277), B notes that English-speaking missionaries have tried to introduce calques of Western politeness formulas, like *sal-nam* “Good day”, *wal-nam* “Good night”, *nam-e dong-a-ma* “Are things good?”, although most speakers find these rather silly. Much more natural are formulas found throughout the E/SE Asian linguistic area, like “Have you eaten?”, or the universal question posed when people meet on the road: *bat-cha i-ang-ing-a* “Where are you going?”⁴⁴ In any event, politeness is usually expressed by body language rather than by verbal formulas.

I find myself in total sympathy with B’s general approach to grammatical description. His primary purpose is to understand the subtleties of the meaning of what people say, a concern which doubtless grew out of his practical need to acquire a spoken knowledge of Garo sufficient for sophisticated anthropological research. He refuses first of all to subordinate the data to somebody’s linguistic theory. This grammar is “a bit thin on formalities” (p. 7). Speaking of the sparing use of pronouns in Mandi, he permits himself a touch of sarcasm (p. 305): “For

⁴³ However, if the native morpheme *-ba* appears only after one of the conjoiners, it means ‘or’: *ang-a ba na-a* ‘I or you’.

⁴⁴ Cf. Thai *paj nǎj*, Lahu *qhò qay le*, etc.

what it is worth, the non-native speaker who is writing this paragraph finds the term ‘pro-drop’ to be whimsically misleading as a characterization of Garo. Subjects, whether pronouns, nouns, or NP’s, simply never need to be put into the sentence at all, so there is nothing to be ‘dropped’.” This lack of any need for a subject is particularly striking in a language like Garo that has no hint whatsoever of the verb agreement one finds in Kuki-Chin.

Almost all of B’s examples are taken from natural speech. If made up by B, the examples have been carefully checked with native speakers. B is acutely aware of the danger of browbeating informants into accepting unnatural utterances suggested by a linguist: “Pushed by an inquiring linguist, consultants will attach almost anything to anything else” (p. 208).

B’s realistic approach has convinced him of the fuzziness of grammatical categories:

“I find it impossible to draw a firm distinction between sequences that are so closely associated that the parts must be considered to form one word and others that form two words. There is an inevitable indeterminacy” (p. 103).

Certain postpositions (e.g. *gin-ang* ‘with, along with’⁴⁵) are probably in the process of becoming case markers (p. 202, p. 238). But:

“it would be an imposition of excessive linguistic tidiness to insist that each form be either a case marker or a postposition, or to imagine that grammatical cases are the sort of thing than can be definitively counted. Most Garo grammatical categories have fuzzy boundaries.”

B’s many decades of work on Garo dialects has given him a longitudinal slant on the evolving nature of its lexicon and grammar, enabling him to say things like “This word seems to be dying out among younger speakers” (p. 238). He has the perspective to appreciate ongoing processes of grammaticalization, as with the numerous adverbial affixes, some of which can still be used as independent verb bases, but many of which now occur only as adverbial modifiers (p. 140).⁴⁶

The physical format of LMM is quite attractive. There is a fair sprinkling of misspellings, none of them affecting the meaning, as well as a handful of substantive typos to correct before the next printing:

- p. 123, l. -16: *a-chak chik-ja-wa* ‘The dog will not bite’ does not illustrate
-*gen*
- p. 125, l. 9: for *principal verb subject* read *principal verb affix*
- p. 130, l. -14 for *-o-de* ‘although’ read *-o-ba* ‘although’
- p. 255, l. 4 (**wal-ni-gin-i*) for ‘two mornings’ read ‘two nights’
- p. 257, l. 9 (*sak-bi sak-git-tam*) for ‘one or two people’ read ‘three or
four people’

⁴⁵ For some speakers *gin-ang* can follow the naked form of the pronoun (and is thus a case-marker), e.g. *ang gin-ang* ‘along with me’; but others insist that *gin-ang* must follow the *-a* form of the pronoun, e.g. *ang-a gin-ang*, like a postposition.

⁴⁶ I have had to deal with similar cases in Lahu, where, e.g. the *versatile verb tā* ‘put down’ has been largely grammaticalized into a *verb particle* meaning ‘durative’, but is still not fully integrated into the system of verb particles (1973: 322–4).

- p. 320, l. 4: (*cha-na*) for eat-Imp read eat-Inf
 p. 321, l. 6: (*bi-ko*) for you-Acc read he-Acc

The style of LMM is clear and friendly, with occasional delightful flashes of humor. Speaking of the morpheme *mang-* ‘classifier for animals’,⁴⁷ B says (p. 250):

“This is used for all sorts of animals, including mammals, birds, insects, etc. I was once treated to a microscopic view of one of my own malarial parasites, and heard it referred to as *mang-sa* ‘animal-one’.”

B’s love for the Garo people shines through this remarkable book. It will be treasured by them, and by all Tibeto-Burmanists, for generations to come.

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47 This is an interesting extension of the PTB root **s-maj* ‘body; corpse’ (HPTB: 265).

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