

**REPORT ON THE 7TH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF THE
NORTH EAST INDIAN LINGUISTICS SOCIETY
DON BOSCO INSTITUTE, GUWAHATI, INDIA
31 JANUARY–4 FEBRUARY, 2012**

Lauren Gawne
University of Melbourne

Amos Teo
Australian National University

The 7th North East Indian Linguistics Society (NEILS7) workshop and conference was held from 31 January to 4 February 2012 at the Don Bosco Institute, Khaghuli Hills, in Guwahati, Assam. The event was organised by Jyotiprakash Tamuli and Anita Tamuli (Gauhati University), Mark Post (James Cook University) and Stephen Morey (La Trobe University). It was heartening to see many new as well as familiar faces, including local researchers from across India (particularly Assam and Manipur) and international ones from Australia, France, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States. Of the countries neighbouring North East India, we also had researchers from Nepal, Bhutan, and, for the first time at a NEILS conference, researchers from Bangladesh.

The two-day workshop that preceded the conference was run by Stephen Morey and Lauren Gawne and provided practical, hands-on training in basic language documentation for community members and students alike. This year we had the fortune to work with speakers of 12 different languages from North East India: Apatani, Bodo, Dimasa, Galo, Hakhun (Tangsa), Meithei, Meyor, Puroik, Rabha, Tai Phake, Tangam and Thadou Chin. It should be noted that some groups, especially those from Arunachal Pradesh, travelled up to four days to participate in the workshop.

The first part of the workshop was spent familiarising ourselves with our recording equipment and some basic recording techniques, then we got straight into recording wordlists and stories. We started talking about good practice like consistent file naming and collecting metadata. For those who collected stories Stephen Morey introduced the BOLD methodology of transcription. For many groups this proved to be a very expedient way of ensuring that the stories they told had at least a general translation into another language. Over the two days we continued to collect data, but also to enrich the data that we had collected, this included trying our hand at transcription programs like ELAN and Transcriber, and discussing archiving and returning materials. Overall, it proved to be a productive and inspiring workshop.

The conference itself was opened by Stephen Morey and Jyotiprakash Tamuli. Shobhana Chelliah launched Hyslop, Morey and Post (2012), *North East Indian Linguistics Volume 4*, which features selected peer-reviewed papers from the 4th NEILS conference. Also, for the first time at a NEILS conference, a trio of local

students sang a medley of Assamese songs as a way of welcoming all the participants.

As in previous years, papers looked at Tibeto-Burman, Tai-Kadai, Austro-Asiatic and Indo-Aryan languages, representing all the major language families of North East India. Given the number of papers and the range of topics covered, it would be impossible to list them. Therefore, the following is a selection of what this year's conference had to offer.

We were treated to a number of new phonological descriptions of Tibeto-Burman languages that are spoken mainly in Assam, Manipur and Nagaland. These included: Liangmai (Ragui Daimai), Biате (C. Lalremzani and Vanlalenglian), Khoibu (L. Bijenkumar Singh) and Syriem (Ashangbam Samani Devi and Pauthang Haokip).

New morphological analyses of two poorly described Tibeto-Burman languages, Liangmai (Guichamlung Daimai) and Rongmei Naga (Debajit Deb) were also presented. Other papers on morphology looked at argument marking in Sumi, a language of Nagaland (Amos Teo), the copular system of Khengkha, a language of Bhutan (Keren Baker), a comparison of the conjunct / disjunct system in Yolmo and Sherpa, two languages of Nepal (Lauren Gawne) and the encoding of clause dependency in War, a Mon-Khmer language of Meghalaya (Anne Daladier).

Papers on phonetics included a study of focus realisation in Assamese intonation (Shakuntala Mahanta and Asimul Islam Twaha), as well as acoustic studies of two major languages of Assam: Boro (Priyankoo Sharma and Aleendra Brahma) and Karbi (Linda Konnerth and Amos Teo), both with a focus on the realisation of lexical tone.

Two papers focused on linguistic typology: one examined whether North East India could be viewed as a 'linguistic area' (Tobias Weber) and another looked at the typological positions of languages of the region (Mark Donohue, Virginia Dawson and Keren Baker). We also had papers on language contact, including a study of the contact Hindi spoken in Shillong (Maansi Sharma) and contact-induced changes in Baram, spoken in Nepal (Dubi Nanda Dhakal). In the field of historical linguistics, we had a discussion of the reconstruction of proto-Khasian (Paul Sidwell) as well as a comparison of East Bodish languages of Bhutan (Gwendolyn Hyslop).

Finally, a few notable mentions include: a survey of language variation and intelligibility perceptions among the Tangshang Naga of Myanmar (Nathan Statezni), issues associated with ISO codes in the face of language diversity (Stephen Morey), the use of the Pear Story in studying reference form in Meitei (Shobhana Chelliah), a critique of current materials used to teach Assamese literacy in schools (Anita Tamuli), postcolonial indigenous languages and cultural change in Bangladesh (Sikder Monoare Murshed), and parallelism in binomials in Chintang ritual language (Ichchha Purna Rai).

On the afternoon of the second day of the conference there was an open panel discussion lead by Shobhana Chelliah, Lolnunthangi Chhangte and Stephen Morey. The topic was how can we, as linguists reconcile the needs of our

employers, our field and the linguistic communities that we work in with the fact that our time and resources were limited. The discussion highlighted the need in communities for more pedagogically motivated research, and the need for linguists to perhaps start building teams to undertake projects rather than attempt to do everything singlehandedly.

In particular, the organizers would like to thank Anita Tamuli and Prafulla Basumatary for all the work they put in to ensure that the conference ran smoothly. They would also like to thank the students of the Gauhati University Linguistics and English Language Teaching departments for all their assistance.

It has been decided by the organising committee that NEILS will now move to a biennial schedule. This has been a decision made in the long term interest of maintaining the quality of the NEILS events and to give the hardworking organisers a much deserved break. We already look forward to seeing you all at NEILS8 in 2014.

REFERENCES

Hyslop, G., S. Morey and M. W. Post, Eds. (2012). *North East Indian Linguistics Vol. 4*. New Delhi, Cambridge University Press India.