

Project Report: A Community-Based Dictionary of Bote

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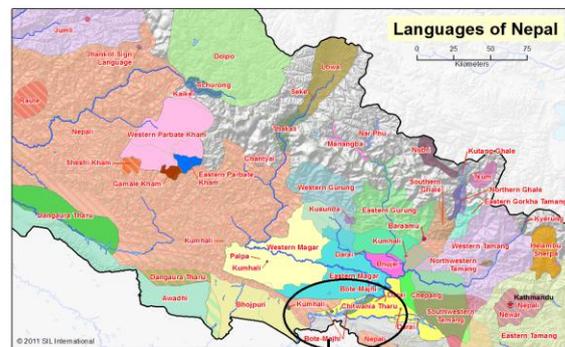
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1. Language Context

Bote is an Indo-Aryan language (ISO639-3: btm; Glotolog Bote 1238) of Indo-European language family spoken by the people referred to by the same name. As recorded in the previous census, there are a total of 8776 Bote people who speak this as their mother tongue. The language is classified as 'threatened' in the language endangerment scale. Unlike some other languages of Nepal specifically concentrated on specific areas, the speakers of Bote have sparsely distributed across different districts from eastern to the western part of the country. However, the major concentration of Bote is found in the Tanahun, and Nawalparasi districts as indicated in Map 1.

As can be seen in the map, the fieldwork for the preparation of the dictionary was conducted in the Nawalparasi district, Nepal. Although the map includes the name 'Bote-Majhi' as a single group, they are two distinct languages. While Majhi is spoken to the eastern part of Nepal, Bote is spoken along the rivers of the the Narayani river, and its tributaries.



Map 1: Bote speaking area¹

2. Genetic affiliation

Since the features of Bote have not been discussed in typological context till the date, the precise genetic classification is yet to resolve. Bote is often classified as: Indo-European, Indo-Aryan, eastern zone, and 'unclassified'. A number of references available note that Bote is not fully classified in lack of its detailed description. More recent studies reveal that the linguistic features of Bote is at a distance from 'eastern' Indo-Aryan languages spoken in Nepal, such as Majhi, Darai, Maithili and Rajbanshi. In other words, Bote lacks the morpho-syntactic features attested in 'eastern Indo-Aryan languages' spoken in Nepal. Instead, it is likely that Bote and Kumal may form a group of Indo-Aryan languages among minor Indo-Aryan languages spoken in Nepal.

¹ Map is taken from SIL International.

3. Language context

The pervasive bilingualism is found in the Bote language. It is now difficult to find a single monolingual speaker of Bote. This dictionary establishes a few things in the study of Bote and Majhi. Firstly, the lexical items presented in this dictionary show that Bote contains distinct lexical items. As mentioned before, it helps establish that Bote is distinct from Majhi spoken to the eastern part of Nepal. As they live along the banks of the river, the Botes used to be involved in fishing, and ferrying people across the rivers and streams. Interestingly, a number of lexical items related to fish, and fishing are still retained in the Bote lexicon.

4. Fieldwork, and data collection

The data for this dictionary were gathered from the Bote speakers of the Nawalparasi district. The lexical items were mainly obtained through direct elicitation. The speakers of Bote in the Nawalparasi district have been scattered in different villages. The speakers were from the villages located in Madhyabindu Municipality, Wards Numbers, 5 and 2 in Nawalparasi district. The first fieldwork was carried out in the first two weeks of January 2020, and two weeks in March 2020. Unfortunately, after the outbreak of Covid-19, and national level lockdown in Nepal, it was not possible to visit the field as planned earlier. In the later phase of the data collection, I spoke to the speakers through telephone to check the data. Some families live in the Kathmady valley as job holders. It was possible to meet them and speak to them to cross-check the data.

5. Significance of the study

This study contributes to the study and promotion of the Bote language encouraging its documentation and standardization. It will be a useful reference material for preparing the teaching materials for Bote children. The constitution of Nepal (2072 vs) has guaranteed the right of the children in their mother tongues. It includes the lexical items of every-day use for the people interested in using and learning the Bote lexical items. This can be useful as the reference materials for teaching the children in their mother tongue. In other words, the reference materials can be useful in the present curriculum of Nepalese education at schools.

6. Organization of the dictionary

This dictionary contains 2325 words, and it consists of four main sections. The introduction to the language and the organization within this is given in the beginning. This is followed by the main contents of the dictionary. The lexical entries in the dictionary contain the words in Devanagari, followed by the words in IPA, its parts of speech, its meaning in Nepali, part of speech in English, and Nepali. This is followed by the semantic groupings of the lexical items. In order to make the dictionary accessible to all users, two more appendices are included. The people who are familiar in Nepali or English will be benefitted by providing them with the opportunities in searching the lexical items of Bote through Nepali or English. As expected in Indo-Aryan languages, Bote shares a large number of lexical items with other IA languages although it presents distinct grammatical patterns.