Chapter 7 Sociohistorical reconstruction of KRNB linguistic history

7.1. Introduction

In this final chapter of historical reconstuction all the threads of linguistic reconstruction from Chapters 4-6 are brought together with sociohistorical reconstruction and culminate in a coherent account of KRNB linguistic history. The sociohistorical framework for establishing and sequencing PEs (proceduralised in Chapter 3) involves six steps—three of which have been completed in Chapters 4-6, and three of which remain to be worked out in this chapter. The tasks remaining for this chapter are those in italics:

I. Reconstruct the directionality of linguistic changes (e.g. by the CM).

II. *Scrutinise in as much detail as possible the social and geographical ranges of the linguistic innovations established under step I.*

III. Apply the three diagnostics (linguistic complexity, ecological distinctiveness, and sociohistorical plausibility) to the innovations reconstructed under step I to establish Propagation Events in linguistic history.

IV. Investigate whether the chronology of any PEs that result from step III can be established (a) by linguistic seriation involving *necessary* diachronic dependency or *plausible* diachronic dependency (cf. section 3.4.3.1), or (b) by textual sequencing.

V. *Consider (i) the possible permutations of SCEs (divisions and integrations) which would account for the disjunction in PNs, (ii) the relative sociohistorical plausibility of each possible permutation, and (iii) the relative sociohistorical plausibility of a SCE as against the co-existence of the PNs within a complex SC. Accordingly, reconstruct the chronology of PEs by selecting the most plausible sociohistorical explanation.*

VI. *Use the chronologies established by sociohistorical sequencing (step V), as well as linguistic seriation and textual sequencing (step IV) to reconstruct an account of the linguistic history.*

Step II involves dialectology, and Step V the reconstruction of SCEs. These two steps utilise distinct sets of data and principles of analysis but are jointly presented here in the context of Step VI: a coherent account of linguistic history resulting from linguistic and sociohistorical methods of reconstruction.

This chapter, given its subject matter, has the potential to be quite open ended. The discipline of sociolinguistics is testimony to the complex social conditioning of propagation of linguistic variants. The dialectological data outlined in this chapter are intentionally limited: limited to the *deshi* 'localised' end of the social domain, limited to a certain number of speakers, and limited to a certain number of tokens for each variant. This renders a *conservative* dialect geography which leaves room for further dialectological and sociolinguistic studies, but is sufficient for our purposes here. Limitations not withstanding, the data presented here and in the appendices constitute the most detailed and systematic dialectological work undertaken of the area to date.[1]

The history that emerges in this chapter is of the formation of the proto-Kamta speech community and its language—ancestral to all contemporary KRNB lects—as the linguistic neighbour of the proto-Gauḍa (Bangla) and proto-Asamiya SCs and languages. The Propagation-Defined Languages (cf. 3.2) spoken by these three proto-SCs were the phylogenetic descendants of a common stage which I argue in 7.3.3 is yet to be properly established by historical reconstruction. The emergence of the proto-Kamta SC was followed by internal divisions, as well as integrations with neighbouring SCs, and resulted in the contemporary lects (language[s] or dialects) known as Kamta, Rajbanshi and Northern Deshi Bangla. The history of KRNB has been divided into three stages: old Kamta (reconstructed in section 7.3), middle KRNB (section 7.4), and modern KRNB (section 7.5), The full 'tree' diagram of this linguistic history is laid out in section 7.5. (schematically adjusted as per section 3.4.4)

[1] Discussion of the selection of test sites, test items and subjects is in Chapter 2.

7.2. Reconstructed changes diagnostic of PEs (and SCEs)

All the reconstructed changes that are either (i) diagnostic of a Propagation Event and its Propagation Network, or (ii) supportive of PEs diagnosed by other changes, are shown in a tableau below. The changes shown do not include those that result from diglossia, which are instead given separately in section 7.5. Dark shaded cells in Table 7-1 indicate a diagnostic change, while light shaded cells indicate a supportive, but non-diagnostic change. The changes have been sorted to bring together rows with a similar range. The arrangement of rows in Table 7-1 is not an indication of sequencing.

	Chronology	Hindi	Oriya	SCB	KS	RL	MH	TH	SH	RP	BH	BN	Kmr	SCA
PI 12	15th century or later													
PI 38	chronology uncertain													
MI 73														
MI 2														
MI 70														
MI 67														
MI 22	tentatively p-Kamrupa stage													
MI 23														
MI 31														
MI 32														
MI 74														
MI 45														
MI 69														
MI 63														
PI 22														
MI 40														
PI 30														
PI 9	tentatively after C16th, after rhoticisation													
PI 37														
MI 42														
PI 28														
PI 14														
PI 15	after PI 16													
PI 3	after rhoticisation													
PI 6	co-occurent with PI 7													
PI 7	co-occurent with PI 6													
MI 47	before MI 56													

	Chronology	Hindi	Oriya	SCB	KS	RL	MH	TH	SH	RP	BH	BN	Kmr	SCA
MI 51														
PI 25														
MI 38														
PI 17														
PI 18														
PI 36														
MI 41														
MI 46	after PI 20 and PI 30-PI 33													
PI 32	after PI 34													
MI 21														
MI 57														
PI 1														
PI 8	after PI 7													
PI 10														
PI 23														
PI 24														
PI 26														
MI 7	before 1400 AD													
MI 1	before 1500 AD													
MI 3	by the 15th century													
MI 6														
MI 19														
MI 20														
MI 60														
MI 33														
MI 34														

	Chronology	Hindi	Oriya	SCB	KS	RL	MH	TH	SH	RP	BH	BN	Kmr	SCA
MI 64														
PI 35	After PI 34 & PI 37													
MI 53														
MI 62														
PI 27														
MI 36														
MI 37														
PI 16	bleeds PI 15													
MI 52														
MI 56	After MI 47 and PI 33													
MI 61	after MI 10													
MI 16														
MI 17														

Table 7-1. Tableau showing unsequenced Propagation Networks

The changes shown in Table 7-1 are now re-ordered in a simplified tableau to give some idea of the 'shape' of the linguistic phylogeny which will be argued for in the rest of this chapter. The lefthand column shows the reconstructed chronological stages of KRNB linguistic history. The chronological and genetic relations between lects are somewhat ambiguous using this method of portrayal, and more exact genetic relationships can be gathered from the tree diagram in 7.5. Dark shading in Table 7-2 does not exclusively indicate diagnostic changes, but also supportive changes whose ranges agree with those of diagnostic changes. Innovations found in only one KRNB lect are excluded from Table 7-2 for simplicity of presentation.

		Hindi	Oriya	SCB	KS	RL	MH	TH	SH	RP	BH	BN	Kamrp	SCA
pre-1250 AD	MI 73 MI 2 MI 70													
	MI 67 MI 22 MI 23													
1250-1550	MI 31 MI 32 MI 74 MI 45 MI 69													
	MI 63													
	MI 7 MI 1 MI 3 MI 6													
1550-1787	PI 6 PI 7 MI 47 MI 51													
	PI 25 MI 38 PI 18 PI 36													
	PI 37													
	PI 8 PI 23 PI 24													
	PI 26 PI 10													
	PI 9													
	PI 30													
	PI 12 PI 38													
1787-the present	PI 32 MI 21													
	MI 41 MI 46													
	PI 17													
	PI 28													
	PI 14 PI 15													
	MI 42													
	PI 22 MI 40													
	PI 3													
	MI 57													
	PI 1													

Table 7-2. Propagation Networks shown in (roughly) sequential order, as reconstructed by sociohistorical criteria in this chapter

The remainder of this chapter presents a sociohistorical argument in support of this chronology of linguistic innovations. There are several further changes, diagnostic of contact relations rather than PEs, which are examined in 7.5.

7.3. The origins of the 'old Kamta' speech community, and its relation to early Bangla and Asamiya: 1250-1550 AD

Several views have been put forward previously on the origin of the KRNB language and dialects, but none have been supported by in-depth, systematic and detailed reconstruction of KRNB linguistic history.[2] Furthermore, supposedly historical classifications have not always been based on robust historical methodology such as the principles of (i) classifying on the basis of innovations and not retentions, and (ii) excluding innovations that are plausibly the result of independent and parallel propagation events (cf. section 3.4). For example, Grierson held that Rajbangsi (an alternative Romanisation of রাজবংশী) was an *eastern* variety of Bangla (1903-28: vol. 4, p18). However, the areas classed by Grierson as north and east Bengal have similar linguistic ecologies, in particular they both include significant contact with Tibeto-Burman languages. Therefore, there is a strong possibility that similarities (in particular phonological similarities) between the Indo-Aryan varieties of north and east Bengal are the result not of unified PEs, but of independent and parallel changes whose structural similarity is the result of similar starting conditions and similar linguistic ecologies (cf. 3.4.1.2). As a result, Grierson's statement of relatedness between KRNB and eastern Bangla is not historically robust.

The received wisdom on KRNB's historical origins and relations boils down to two propositions.[3] Firstly, that an Indo-Aryan language spread from *Māgadha* (an area of today's Bihar) eastwards and northwards to *Kāmatā* (now pronounced [kamṭa], i.e. today's North Bengal) and from there further east to *Kāmarupa* (i.e. today's Assam). The implication of this position, which seems to have been initiated by Grierson, is that KRNB and Asamiya share a common linguistic ancestor and thus constitute a subgroup. The second piece of received wisdom is that Bangla and Asamiya (and KRNB) constitute a linguistic subgroup (Bengali-Assamese), and are more closely related to each other than to Oriya. This claim regarding subgrouping within the

[2] The great linguistic studies that have made claims regarding KRNB (especially Chatterji 1926) are without question in-depth and systematic, but their subject matter is not KRNB linguistic history *per se*. While they treat their own subject with rigour, they make no special study of KRNB, and treat it only peripherally and in passing.

[3] The broader and older historical relations—such as between proto-eastern Magadhan and other Magadhan lects, or the historical relation to still earlier stages of Indo-Aryan—fall outside the scope of this study.

eastern Magadhan languages was advocated by Chatterji and others who followed him. Both propositions are critically examined below in the light of this reconstruction of KRNB linguistic history.

7.3.1. The proto-Kamta speech community: c.13th-16th centuries AD

The first question to be addressed, as a keystone for understanding KRNB linguistic history, is the sequencing of (a) those PEs which uniquely define the KRNB lects, and (b) those which define smaller divisions within KRNB.

There are six changes identified by this study which uniquely define KRNB. All of these changes are morphological, and five are diagnostic of PEs:

[MI 31.] *m^{ɲ}ra reinterpreted as 'PL.**NOM'** in pronoun system, and extended as such to third person *[o,u]mra {KRNB, also some Hajong lects}. Diagnostic.

[MI 32.] *m^{ɲ}a- reinterpreted as 'PL.**OBL'** in pronoun system, and extended to third person *[o,u]m^{ɲ}a- {KRNB, also some Hajong lects}. Diagnostic.

[MI 45.] *-ʈ^{h}ɛ + kuna > *-ʈ^{h}ɛkuna 'place' as a base of locational pronominals. {KRNB}. Diagnostic.

[MI 63.] > *-u˜ '1.SG', *-ɔ˜ '1.PL' in AGR.IIA systems {KRNB, except BN}. Diagnostic.

[MI 74.] In AGR.IMP, *-ɛ '2.SG' + *-kɔ > *-ɛkɔ '2.SG' {KRNB, some Hajong lects}. Diagnostic.

[MI 69.] -*anti* '3.PL' > … > *-[ɔ,ɛ]n(ṭi) '2.PL' {KRNB}. Supportive, not diagnostic

While the PEs indicated by these innovations are diagnostic of a KRNB PN (and Propagation-defined language), there are also PEs which have more limited ranges (cf. 7.4-7.5). For example, the palatalisation PE diagnoses the central KRNB PN and its PDL.

The disjunction between the KRNB-wide PN and more localised PNs may have resulted from several theoretically-possible sociohistorical scenarios. Firstly, the disjunction between PNs could reflect different levels of inclusiveness within a complex SC. Secondly, the disjunction could reflect earlier SC unity followed by SC division. Thirdly, the disjunction could reflect earlier SC differentiation followed by SC integration. Fourthly, the disjunction between PNs could reflect a combination of the first three scenarios. Each different sociohistorical explanation has different

implications for the sequencing of linguistic history. These alternative explanations are evaluated below in the light of the known social history of the area.

Alongside considerations of sociohistorical plausibility, the sociohistorical reconstruction is also informed by (though not *determined* by) the principle of economy: *reconstruct the fewest number of SCEs necessary to account for the disjunctions between PNs*. This means that multiple PEs with the same range of propagation will be treated as diagnostic of the same PN unless there are textual or linguistic reasons to discount such a reconstruction. Therefore, we start with the hypothesis that the six KRNB-wide PEs listed above diagnose a single PN and its Propagation-Defined Language—termed 'proto-Kamta' for sociohistorical reasons given below. (Recall from section 3.4 that each Propagation Event diagnoses a Propagation Network of speaker interaction. The utterances used by this PN are termed the Propagation-Defined Language. These are the key concepts used to reconstruct linguistic phylogeny).

The KRNB-wide PN reflects:

- a period of social integration that is phylogenetically ancestral to the present day KRNB lects, but not to other e.Mg. lects; and
- a period of social division between this proto-Kamta (KRNB) speech community and the neighbouring proto-Bangla and proto-Asamiya SCs.

There are two key sociohistorical events which, when taken together, put bookends on either side of a period of history that plausibly gave rise to the proto-Kamta SC: *Aryanisation* and *kingdom expansion*.

7.3.1.1. *Terminus post quem*: Aryanisation of the Kamta region

Regarding the first of these historical events, it is generally accepted that earlier inhabitants of the KRNB area spoke Tibeto-Burman languages (such as continue to be spoken by the Boro and Rabha peoples).[4] Aryanisation of language was accompanied by Aryanisation of culture, though the temporal co-incidence of the two was not necessarily exact. It is important to distinguish between the course of

[4] Alternative views, exemplified by Ram Prasad Majumder (1955), are not generally shared by scholarship (cf. Clark 1969: 175ff.)

Aryanisation among the *ruling classes* and that among the *peasant classes*, with the Aryanisation of the former not necessarily entailing immediate Aryanisation of the latter. Archaeological evidence suggests that Aryanism was established quite early in the *Pundra-Vardhana* (or *Barendra*) region, which is today's north-central Bengal (south of KRNB).

> It will appear that Aryanism spread in Bengal first in Puṇḍra (North Bengal) and next through that country to Vanga (South and South-East Bengal). That the above areas of Bengal already became strongholds of Aryan culture in the third and second centuries B.C. is also suggested by epigraphic evidence. The earliest epigraphic record so far discovered in Bengal comes from Mahasthan (ancient Puṇḍranagara in the present Bogra district of North Bengal in East Pakistan). The inscription is written in the Prakrit language and in the Brāhmī script assignable to the second century B.C. The popularity of Prakrit exhibited by the above inscriptions no doubt points to the considerably strong hold of Aryanism in the northern and eastern parts of Bengal in the centuries before Christ (Sircar 1952: 172)

The Pundra-Vardhana region was geographically adjacent to, but did not include, the present-day KRNB-speaking area which was instead included within the kingdom of Prāgjyotisha, later known as Kāmrupa. The border between these two polities generally corresponded to the course of the Karatoya-Tista river system (Clark 1969: 191; see also R. C. Majumdar & J. N. Sarkar 1943: 24-25). While Buddhist rulers reigned in Pundra-Vardhana, many Brahmins sought refuge in Kamrupa with its Hindu rulers (Clark 1969: 180; Choudhury 1966: 423). Barua reports this immigration of Brahmins to have continued "right up to the Ahom period", i.e. around 1200 AD (Barua 2003: 142). However, the extent of Aryanisation in Kāmrupa seems to have been limited to the ruling classes, and excluded the general populace:

> Although it is evident that the ruling houses of ancient Assam took on the framework of Hinduism very early, it is far more difficult to decide the speed with which the more ordinary people of Assam and North Bengal became Aryanised and adopted Hinduism. By the time Hiuen Ts'ang (Yuan Chwang) the famous Chinese Buddhist pilgrim, traveled through the area as late as the seventh century, more than half a millennium after the ruling house is thought to have claimed descent from Vishnu, [Chatterji] stated that "the Aryanisation of the language does not appear to have progressed much." (Clark 1969: 191-192 [citing Chatterji 1963: 34, though Clark has mistakenly written "Ts'ang" for Chatterji. This has been amended—MT]).

The end of the 12th century saw the devastating arrival of the first Muslim invador Bakhtiar Khilji, who overran both the kingdoms of Pundra-Vardhana (with its capital at Gaur) and Kamrupa (with its capital in the vicinity of Guwahati). The Muslim invaders were soon repelled from Kamrupa, and despite further attempts during the 13th century, failed to gain any lasting control over the present day regions of Rangpur, Cooch Behar and Jalpaiguri which all remained within Kamrupa society and polity. The area of Pundra-Vardhana, on the other hand, became from this time on permanently united with the regions to the south within a social and political entity later called Bengal. With repeated assaults upon Kamrupa from Gaur in the south-west, the capital was moved from Guwahati (in today's Assam) to Kamatapur (in today's Cooch Behar district), in order it would seem to better counter the aggressive Muslim neighbours. Acharyya (1966: 150) writes that this shift in capital "took place immediately after the defeat and death of Malik Yuzbeg [the third Muslim invader] in 1255".[5]

Though sociohistorical records are not explicit regarding the timing of the language shift from Tibeto-Burman to Indo-Aryan language, it is probable that the shift in in the seat of the Kamrupa government to Kamatapur was a major factor in bringing it about.[6] The driving force behind the Aryanisation of speech in the Brahmaputra valley had been the capital located in the vicinity of Guwahati (Clark 1969: 197).

[5] Accharya states elsewhere that "We have no record of serious trouble from the Ahoms who were at this time establishing themselves firmly on the eastern part of Assam. The change of capital, therefore, probably had no connection with the Ahom invasion of Upper Assam" (*ibid.*: 143-144).

[6] Nowadays, this area is completely Aryanised, though with pockets of Tibeto-Burman speakers still inhabiting the thick jungle areas of Jalpaiguri to the north of Cooch Behar.

This was the centre, both religiously and politically, from which Aryan influence radiated outwards. The shift of capital westwards to Kamatapur in the 13th century established a new centre of cultural influence, and must have given a great impetus to the Aryanisation of the Tibeto-Burman peoples living around Kamatapur. Geographically located at the heart of what would become the KRNB-speaking area, Kamatapur as capital would have been a point of social reference for the surrounding villages, and a force for social integration, to a degree that Guwahati as capital had not been, on account of its considerable distance to the east. I hypothesise that Indo-Aryan influence greatly increased in the KRNB area after the shift in capital and that this increased Aryanism gave rise to the proto-Kamta SC and its language (defined by morphological changes 31, 32, 45, 63, 69 and 74). This proto-Kamta SC and its language is the phylogenetic ancestor of all present day KRNB lects.

Given the shift of capital as a *terminus post quem* for the linguistic Aryanisation of the peasant class in the KRNB-speaking area, the emergence of proto-Kamta, distinct from proto-Bangla and proto-Asamiya may be dated as *subsequent to 1255 AD*. This is the 'leftwards bookend' after which the emergence of proto-Kamta plausibly occurred. The 'rightwards bookend', or *terminus ante quem*, is provided by *kingdom expansion* in the 16th century.

7.3.1.2. *Terminus ante quem*: kingdom expansion

At the present time, the lects defined by the six KRNB-wide changes are distributed as far west as Morang district of Nepal. This area goes considerably beyond the boundaries of the Kamata-Kamrupa kingdom of the 13th to 15th centuries, but corresponds neatly with the westernmost limit attained after the expansion of the Koch kingdom during the 16th century. The history is recorded as follows.

After the shift in capital to Kamatapur, the kingdom seems to have been referred to as Kamata rather than Kamrupa, and during the 14th and 15th centuries the rajas of Kamata were referred to as *Kāmatesvara* 'Lord of Kamata'. Achharya (1966: 144ff.) lists three dynasties of kings who ruled Kamata during this period. The third of these dynasties was the Khyans or Khens, whose rule came to an end in 1498 AD with the onslaught wrought by Alauddin Hussain, the Sultan of Gaur (1493-1519). Kamatapur

was sacked, and the Kamatesvara overthrown. Once again, the Muslim control over Kamta was short lived, and the occupying forces were driven away around 1505 AD by local chieftains called 'Bhuyans' with the aid of the Ahom king (*ibid.*: 177). A power vacuum ensued in the area, until a member of the Koch tribe known as Bisu (later given the more illustrious name of Biswa Singha) subdued the local chieftains one by one, and made himself "the master of a dominion extending as far as the Karatoya in the west and the Barnadi in the east. He made a magnificent city in Kochbehar as his capital" (*ibid.*: 189-190). The extent of this kingdom is shown in Figure 7-1 (reproduced from Whyte 2002: 546). During the reign of Biswa Singha his followers began to be called *Rajbanshi* 'royal race or lineage' (Gait 1905: 45), a term which grew in popularity in later centuries and remains to this day.

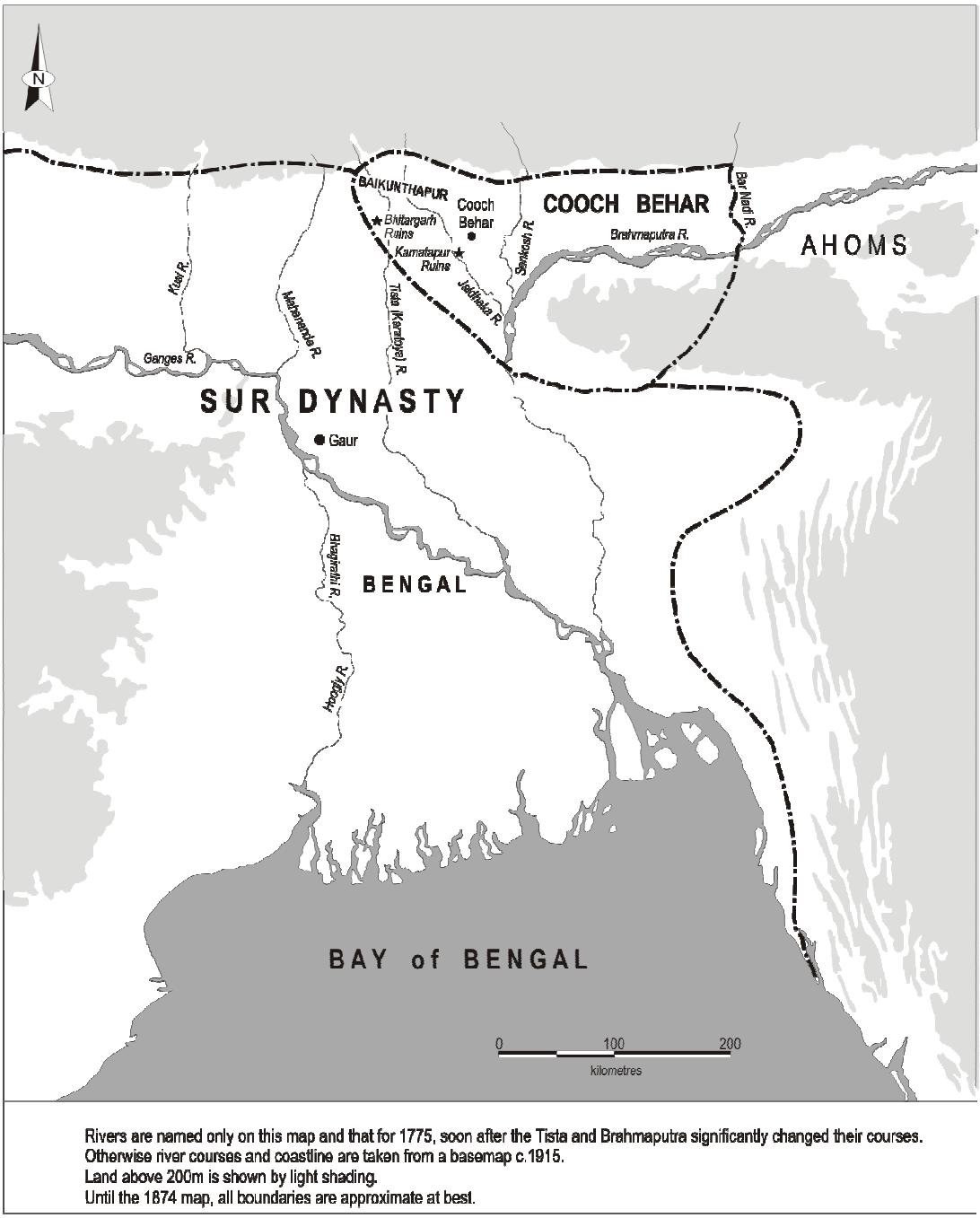


Figure 7-1. Cooch Behar under its first Maharaja, Biswa Singh c. 1540

After Biswa Singha's death, his son Malla Deva became Maharaja of Cooch Behar and assumed the title Nara Narayan. Another of Biswa Singha's sons, Sukhladhvaj, became the commander-in-chief of the Koch armies (Gait 1905). Sukhladhvaj was an enormously successful general. He extended the boundaries of his brother's kingdom in all directions (excepting south-westwards to Gaur) by defeating the Ahoms and the Kacharis, the Jayantia, Tippera and Sylhet kings, and winning the submission of other rulers (Acharyya 1966: 194ff.). On account of his successes on the battle field he was

nicknamed Chilarai ‘the kite king’. The geographical extent of the Koch kingdom under Maharaja Nara Narayana and commander-in-chief Chilarai is shown in Figure 7-2 (reproduced from Whyte 2002: 467)

Figure 7-2. Cooch Behar’s zenith under Nar Narayan (after Ahmed 1936) c. 1560

These territorial gains, though substantial, were not long enjoyed. The Maharaja Nara Narayana lacked his brother’s inclination or genius for war, and the death of Chilarai from small pox during a campaign against Gaur (c. 1571 AD [Acharyya 1966: 206]) was followed by the gradual break up of the Koch kingdom.

From this account of 16th century socio-political history we can distil the following points relevant to sequencing KRNB linguistic history:

1. The 16th century expansion of the Koch kingdom is the most plausible sociohistorical explanation for the linguistic connection between today's Morang and Jhapa (in Nepal) and the rest of the KRNB area (in today's India and Bangladesh). It is plausible that this socio-political expansion resulted in the westwards migration of speakers of the old Kamta language (defined by its innovative features) into the newly conquered jungle area of today's Nepal Terai. As well as introducing new inhabitants to the area, the occupation of these territories would also have exposed its Tibeto-Burman-speaking occupants to the proto-Kamta language. *Never before, and never since, did the control and influence of Kamta stretch so far west.*
2. However, the sociohistorical connection between Morang and Koch Behar was short-lived, and therefore it is unlikely that the proto-Kamta innovations were propagated across this area after the expansion. Instead, it is more sociohistorically plausible that the proto-Kamta morphological innovations underwent propagation *in the regions near Koch Behar after its Aryanisation, and before the expansion westwards*. The innovative features would then have been carried to the newly conquered western area as part of the proto-Kamta language spoken by the Koch armies and settlers.

This sociohistorical scenario of *propagation followed by migration* accounts for:

(a) The presence of the diagnostic p-Kamta changes in the MH, RL and KS lects included in this reconstruction;

(b) The influence of Hindi and Bihari lects upon these same three lects. From the 17th century these areas fell beyond the bounds of Koch political control and social influence, and instead came under Mughal control and the social influence of Mithila in northern Bihar. It is notable in this respect that the great roads built by Maharaja Nara Narayana stretched *eastwards* from Koch Behar rather than *westwards* (Gait 1905: 48, 56);

(c) The division of the proto-Kamta SC into smaller SCs defined by more localised PEs. As stated above, the westwards expansion of Koch control and influence was not a lasting phenomenon. This increase in geographical separation between speakers, and absence of ongoing socio-political connection, would have resulted in *reduced interaction* between speakers in the west and speakers in Koch Behar proper. Therefore, the most plausible sociohistorical effect which the political expansion had upon the proto-Kamta speech community is the *division of its former unity*.

In summary: based on sociohistorical reconstruction, the proto-Kamta innovations seem to have been propagated within a PN sometime between the 13th and 16th centuries AD. The *terminus post quem* for this proto-Kamta network was the shift in capital to Kamatapur during the 13th century, and the *terminus ante quem* was the expansion of the Koch kingdom during the 16th century. The proto-Kamta speech community was a population of speakers (over several generations) who lived east of the Karatoya-Tista river in the region near Kamatapur, amongst whom specific and unique innovations (MI 31, 32, 45, 63, 69 and 74) were propagated during the early centuries of their Aryanisation. These common innovations have been inherited by the linguistic descendants of proto-Kamta, which include the present-day KRNB lects and also at least some of the Hajong lects spoken in the Garo hills. To date, no proper linguistic study has been made of the Hajong lects on which a reconstruction of historical connections with KRNB could be based.

7.3.1.3. Comparison with the Maharaja's letter of 1555 AD

This overall hypothesis receives some confirmation from the letter of Maharaja Nara Narayana to the Ahom king, written in 1555 AD. The following points of comparison may be made between the language of the letter, and the innovative proto-Kamta features dated above as 1250-1550 AD:

- MI 69. The agreement ending *-ɔn(t̪i) '2.PL' is not found in the letter. The second person agreement endings used to address the Ahom king are *-ek*

‘2.SG’ and -*ā* ‘2.SG’.[7] These do not prove the absence of *-ɔn(t̪i) ‘2.PL’ in the language of the time, but indicate that *-ɔn(t̪i) did not function as a marker of ‘high honour second person singular’ agreement.

- MI 74. The agreement ending *-ɛk is found with *future* imperative function for second person singular in the letter. The overlap in function between general imperative (as is reconstructed for *-ɛk ‘2.SG:IMP’ in 6.4.2.2) and future imperative (as is attested by -*ek* ‘2.SG:FUT.IMP’ in the letter) provides support for the reconstruction of MI 74 as a pre-16th century change. There are no instances of a present imperative formation in the letter.

- MI 63. -u˜ ‘1P.SG’, -ɔ˜ ‘1P.PL’ in AGR.IIa. A pre-16th century sequencing of this change is also supported by the Koch king’s letter. He writes **লেখনং** কার্য্যঞ্চ। এথা আমার কুশল। তোমার কুশল নিরন্তরে বাঞ্ছা **করি।** The crucial words here are given in bold and are, respectively, transliterated as *lekhnaṁ* ‘we have written’ (probably pronounced [lekʰnɔŋ]) and *kari* ‘we do’ (probably pronounced [kori]). The second form is included as evidence that when the letter writer is the grammatical subject, the agreement is with *first person plural*. The form [lekʰnɔŋ] conforms with the reconstructed secondary ending *-ɔ˜ ‘1PL’ (here probably pronounced [-ɔŋ]).

- MI 31. The dating of this unique proto-Kamta change prior to the 16th century is supported by the use of ইমরাক *imrāk* ‘them’ in the Maharaja’s letter.

- MI 32. The use of *imrā-* as an oblique pronoun (suffixed by -*k* ‘DAT’) in the Maharaja’s letter raises some doubts as to whether MI 32 was a regular or variable part of the language in 1555 AD. This reduces the diagnostic value of MI 32.

- MI 45. *-ʈʰɛ + kuna > *-ʈʰɛkuna ‘place’ as a base of locational pronominals. This change is not attested in the letter, but the letter is very short and the

[7] The presence of -*ā* is telling, and suggests the p-Kamta system reconstructed in 6.4 should be expanded to include *-a. This would also have implications for the reconstruction of proto-Kamrupa, as the emergence of *-a ‘2SG.High’ in secondary systems is plausibly a common KRNB & Asamiya (i.e. proto-Kamrupa) change.

omission of *-ʈʰɛkuna ‘place’, as in the case of the 2PL ending *-ɔn(ʈi) discussed above, does not prove its absence from the language of the time.

The full text of the letter is reproduced in Barma (1991: 3-4). The above analysis of its language is not exhaustive, but is sufficient to verify that the Maharaja’s letter supports the pre-16th century chronology assigned to MI 74, MI 63 and MI 31 by sociohistorical sequencing. The sequencing of just one change—MI 32—may need to be reassessed in the light of the letter’s evidence.

7.3.2. The proto-Eastern Magadhan speech community

A complete reconstruction of the sociohistorical formation and breakup of the eastern Magadhan speech community—from which we get Bangla, Oriya, Asamiya, KRNB, plus others—is beyond the scope of this study. Nevertheless, a few points are in order to clarify some misconceptions that have been held in this regard. Firstly, let us consider the innovative features given by Chatterji as characteristic of the eastern Magadhan lects (1926: 93-94). They are:

- Fully rounded pronunciation [ɔ] of the character written as অ, অ, অ (transliterated as *a*). This contrasts with the inherited unrounded pronunciation of the NIA midlands.
- A palatal pronunciation of the inherited sibilant. However, because this pronunciation is inherited from p-Mg., and not innovative, it is not diagnostic of a propagation event that would define e.Mg.
- Transposition of medial *i, *u is a regular feature of these lects, unlike in the Bihari lects where it is a sporadic occurrence.
- *kṣ* (in Tatsama words) becomes *(k)khy. However, this change is not unique to these lects (cf. Masica 1991: 201).
- Genitive in -r < -*kēra, kara*. While this may have been a morphologically specific change (and hence diagnostic of e.Mg.) it is not of great diagnostic value given the general MIA pattern of leniting and deleting single intervocalic stops (cf. Masica 1991: 180ff.).

- disuse or restricted use of the genitive in *-ka.* The principle adopted in this study is that instances of disuse and loss of parts of constructions are of low value for diagnosing a PE (see further 3.4.1.1).
- Past and future bases in *-il, -ib*. This contrasts with the rest of the Magadhan lects which have *-al, -ab.* According to Chatterji's (*ibid.*: 940ff.) reconstruction, the variation in vowel between eastern and other Magadhan lects is the result of inherited variation with subsequent regularisation. Chatterji reconstructs the etymology thus: "the past base in «-il-» in Bengali, Assamese and Oṛiyā, in «-al-» in the Bihārī speeches, and in «-il-, -al » in Marāṭhī, and similar «-l-» forms in the other NIA. speeches, originated from the OIA. «-ta, -ita» *plus* the OIA. diminutive or adjectival affix «-la-» in the extended forms «-ila, -a-la, > -illa (-ĕlla),-alla»" (*ibid.*: 941). Regularisation of inherited variation is not considered diagnostic of a PE in this study because of the possibility that the regularisation occurred independently and in parallel (cf. 3.4.1.4).
- a passive participle in *-ā.*
- "confusion between roots « ah » and « hō » both meaning *is*, but derived from different roots".

This evidence is a mixed bag; some is solid enough, some is easily dismissed. Certainly there is scope for fresh studies of the historical relations between eastern and other Magadhan lects, based on more stringent methodology of historical reconstruction.

Secondly, accepting for a moment that there is at least some evidence for a unified stage of development among the eastern Magadhan lects, we should consider the possible chronology of this unified stage. Chatterji is once more our clearest guide on the matter. Regarding the emergence of Oriya, he writes:

> In the early part of the 7th century, we have … the testimony of the Chinese traveller [Hiuen Ts'ang] that the sea-board country where Oṛiyā is now spoken was non-Aryan in speech. Yet we have epigraphical evidence to show that Brahmans were settled in non-Aryan Kōŋgōda with grants of land precisely when Hiuen Thsang noticed the general linguistic condition of the country … What would seem to have been the case is that the Ōḍra people were receiving Aryan speech from the neighbouring Suhman and Rāḍha, in the 7th century and before, as well as during the subsequent period, and they rapidly became Aryanised (Chatterji 1926: 105-106)

The first point to be made from this statement is that a pre-Oriya lect emerged, distinct from pre-Bangla, in all likelihood *only after the 7th century AD*. This is the *terminus post quem* for the division of any proto-eMg speech community. There is evidence (again from Hiuen Ts'ang) that Aryanisation of language had begun (though not progressed very far) in Kamrupa by the 7th century AD—at least in the regions nearby the capital (in the vicinity of Guwahati).

Thirdly, we may consider the mechanisms for propagation of changes that may have existed during late MIA and very early NIA. During this period Indo-Aryan language and culture was spreading into the areas of Odra and Kamrupa and Banga, but the spread was patchy and the bulk of the general populace probably remained non-Indo-Aryan speaking. As mentioned in section 7.3.1, migration and resettlement of Brahmans was not at all uncommon, and indeed became more frequent as more areas embraced Aryan religious teachings. In all likelihood it was this migration and interaction between the priestly classes which enabled propagation of common e.Mg. linguistic innovations between the outlying colonies of Aryanisation in Kamrupa, Banga and Odra, as they lived surrounded by non-Aryan speaking peoples.

In conclusion, the case for a unified e.Mg. stage, characterised by propagation events, remains to be made using robust historical methodolgoy. Some evidence has been put forward by Chatterji, but renewed research on this matter is required. The situation may turn out to be similar to how Grierson described it:

> East of Māgadha lay the Gauḍa or Prāchya Apabhraṁśa, the head-quarters of which were at Gaur, in the present district of Malda. It spread to the south and south-east, and here became the parent of modern Bengali. Besides spreading southwards, Gauḍa Apabhraṁśa also spread to the east keeping north of the Ganges, and is there represented at the present day by Northern Bengali and, in the valley of Assam, by Assamese. Northern Bengal and Assam did not get their language from Bengal proper, but directly from the west. Māgadha Apabhraṁśa, in fact, may be considered as spreading out eastwards and southwards in three directions. To the north-east it developed into Northern Bengali and Assamese, to the south into Oriya, and between the two into Bengali. Each of these three descendants is equally directly connected with the common immediate parent, and hence we find Northern Bengali agreeing in some respects rather with the Oriya spoken far away to the south than with the Bengali of Bengal proper, of which it is usually classed as a subordinate dialect.' (Grierson 1903-28 Vol. 1: 126)

Suffice it to say here that this general picture would at the very minimum need to be supplemented with accounts of the later common innovations which were propagated across these partially differentiated lects (see below).

7.3.3. Considering the proto-Bengali-Assamese speech community

The KRNB lects are classified in the Ethnologue, along with 15 other lects, as Bengali-Assamese (Gordon 2005). This has long been held to constitute a historical linguistic subgroup. "The agreement between Assamese and Bengali is so close that the dialects of Bengali and Assamese may be described as belonging to the same group" writes Chatterji (1926: 108), though he declines to outline common innovative features. This subgrouping hypothesis has been subjected to detailed comparative reconstruction by Pattanayak (1966).

Pattanayak defines the putative proto-Asamiya-Bangla stage on the basis of four innovations:

1) merger of alveolar and postalveolar nasals;
2) merger of alveolar and postalveolar laterals;
3) merger of *ɖ and *ɖʱ in medial position;

4) lowering of *e > /ɛ/ when followed by a low vowel.

The first two innovations have been discussed in section 4.3.7, where they are found to have occurred subsequent to the 15th century AD and include not only Bangla, Asamiya and KRNB, but also Hindi and the Bihari lects among others. The third of Pattanayak's innovations is the merger of medial *ɖ and *ɖ^{ɦ}. This innovation has been discussed in section 4.3.4. Out of the 8 KRNB lects included in this reconstruction, it is presently regular in only SH, RP and BH, with some irregularity in BN. It is part of a broader phonological change that also affected medial *h, *m^{ɦ}, *n^{ɦ} and *l^{ɦ} by turning breathy voicing of continuants into modal voicing (see [PI 9.]). The chronology of this change was reconstructed tentatively as post-16th century AD. Chatterji writes:

> The aspirates, initial and intervocal, which Bengal inherited from OIA, were preserved intact in the [Old Bengali], and to a very large extent in the [early Middle Bengali] period. But even from the [early Middle Bengali] period, from the latter part of the 15th century it would seem, (judging from the orthography of Early Bengali MSS., and from [New Bengali] history of the aspirates), the aspirates as well as «-h-» grew rather feeble in an intervocal position—and also finally (Chatterji 1926: 441)

and again, addressing specifically the *ɖ/*ɖ^{ɦ} merger:

> It seems in the early 16th century, voiced aspirated forms like পড় «påṛh-» *read* ... বাঢ়ে «bāṛh» *increases* … still obtained, although it is likely that the aspiration had become feeble. The voiced aspirates seem to have preserved the aspiration (in the West Central dialect [i.e. SCB—MT]) longer than the unvoiced ones, in both final and intervocal positions. Chatterji 1926: 442)

The fourth of Pattanayak's changes relevant to Bangla-Asamiya historical relations, is lowering of *e > /ɛ/ when followed by a low vowel. This seems to be a misinterpretation of the correspondence sets. The historical event was not the lowering of *e to /ɛ/ but, as argued in section 4.4.3 the phoneme /ɛ/ is the inherited phoneme in these lects, with /e/ resulting from loan words and regressive raising of *ɛ to /e/ before a high vowel. In Bangla /e/ also results from the lowering of *i, but not in Asamiya. As articulated in 4.4.3, the presence of regressive raising *ɛ > i in early

Oriya suggests that regressive raising of *ɛ is inherited from the e.Mg. stage (though this stage is yet to be adequately reconstructed). Consequently, we cannot identify a unique Bangla-Asamiya stage of historical interaction based on either of the phonemes /e/ or /ɛ/.

In summary: none of Pattanayak's changes are diagnostic of a unique proto-Bangla-Asamiya subgroup that also includes proto-Kamta. Pattanayak's first three innovations are post-proto-Kamta events which spread across already differentiated lects after the 15th century. The sociohistorical conditioning and subgrouping value of that spread across Bangla, Asamiya and part of KRNB is considered in section 7.4.4. Grierson's contention may well be true that "Gauḍa Apabhraṁśa" was the parent speech both of Kamrupa and today's Bengal (see quote under 7.3.2), *but it has not yet been proven as such by careful historical linguistic reconstruction*. Statements to the effect of "but it's obvious" do not qualify as historical arguments as they do not properly differentiate between retentions and innovations, or, between *general NIA* propagation events which are post-15th century (see 7.4.4) and the pre-13th century speech communities that were already differentiated before the later common changes came through.

Though it has not been the purpose of this study to reconstruct higher level protolanguages beyond proto-Kamta, the reconstruction here has turned up three morphological innovations—MI 73 (diagnostic), MI 2 (supportive), MI 70 (supportive)—which provide some evidence for a protolanguage which may be termed proto-Gauḍa-Kamrupa. Furthermore, MI 40 may also have undergone propagation during the p-Gauḍa-Kamrupa stage, with subsequent replacement of the morpheme *mɔn̪ṭɔ 'like, similar to' through change [MI 38.] in north-west KRNB. (North-west KRNB is defined in 7.5.2).

7.3.4. Considering the proto-Kamrupa speech community

The *Kamta-Asamiya* subgrouping hypothesis was probably first articulated by Grierson (see quote at the end of section 7.3.2). At this point, Chatterji (1926, cf. p148) and Kakati (1962, cf. p5) concur with Grierson's diagnosis, and the same position is reflected in recent statements, like that of Baruah and Masica:

> Assamese is most closely related to Bangla, particularly to the northern dialects of that language. In fact, the (northern) Rajbangshi "dialect" of Bangla could be considered a dialect of Assamese that has come under Bengali cultural hegemony. (2001: 43)

This view entails (in traditional terms) a subgrouping of KRNB and Asamiya, and (in the terms of this study) a common ancestral Propagation Network diagnosed by a PE.

The problem with this proposition is that, as for the Bengali-Assamese subgroup, it is yet to be substantially proven. While stated in several previous academic works, none that I have found present *linguistic evidence* in its support. Instead, the position is mostly argued on the basis of political history, including the king of Cooch Behar's patronage of early Asamiya language, among other politico-historical links between Kamta and Kamrupa. The position taken by this study is that political history (and social history more generally) is relevant to linguistic history and phylogenetic classification *only in so much as it conditions the propagation of linguistic innovations among speakers*. In the absence of unique and diagnostic innovations, *political or social history is not relevant to linguistic history*.

The use of political history in this chapter is thus unlike the use of political history in, for example, the following quote from Kakati:

> It was under the patronage of kings outside the western limit of modern Assam,—under the patronage of the kings of Kāmatāpur … that the earliest Assamese books were written. Even now the spoken language of North Bengal and western Assam (districts of Kāmrūp and Goālpārā) is substantially the same and seems to form one dialect group. (Kakati 1962: 6)

The only evidence for this one-ness of dialect grouping that Kakati presents is the early medieval political unity. Kakati's argument does not constitute a historical *linguistic* argument because it does not centre on the distribution of unique and diagnostic linguistic changes.

What evidence then is there of *linguistic innovations* common to all KRNB and Asamiya lects, but not common further afield in NIA? Are we justified in talking of Asamiya and KRNB as a subgroup? The phonological and morphological reconstruction of the present study has found three morphological innovations that

give some answers to these questions.[8] They are MI 67 (diagnostic), MI 22 (supportive), and MI 23 (supportive). These changes provide evidence for a proto-Kamrupa stage of linguistic history—ancestral to proto-Kamta and proto-wKamrupa (Asamiya). However, a thorough KRNB-and-Asamiya-wide reconstruction of linguistic history is required before this proto-stage can be considered robustly established.

The question remains: did the propagation of MI 67, MI 22 and MI 23 occur before or after the propagation of the changes that define the proto-Kamta stage? A plausible, yet perhaps inconclusive chronology is suggested by the sociohistorical account given in section 7.3.1 for the origin of the proto-Kamta speech community.

If: Indo-Aryan language was established first in the area surrounding the Kamrupa capital, and only became established in today's KRNB area after the shift of capital to Kamatapur;

Then it is plausible, though not conclusive, that MI 67, 22 and 23 had occurred during the period of the eastern capital of Kamrupa (pre 13th century), and were inherited into the proto-Kamta language after the shift in capital.

This hypothesis suggests a common linguistic origin for both KRNB and Asamiya in an earlier proto-Kamrupa speech community.

There are further *distinctive* phonological and morphological features shared between KRNB and Asamiya, but such features tend to be either *inherited* from Eastern Magadhan, or instead, propagated subsequent to the breakup of proto-Kamta and thus *only reflected in a subsection of KRNB*. The distinctive but non-innovative features common to KRNB and Asamiya include the case markers: *-ɔkɔ 'Dative' and *-ɔt̪ɔ 'Locative'. See sections 5.3.6 and 5.3.7 for the arguments that these case markers are inherited from a pre-Kamrupa source and as such are not diagnostic of proto-Kamrupa.

The history of innovative features shared between Asamiya and only a subset of KRNB lects is analysed further in 7.5.4.2.

[8] There is plenty of evidence for major linguistic propagation between Asamiya and *eastern* KRNB (Bongaigaon), see 7.5.4.2.

7.3.5. The proto-Asamiya speech community: 13th century onwards

There are many innovative phonological and morphological characteristics of the Asamiya lects. Kakati (1962) is the primary exponent on this topic, with his main intention to establish that Asamiya and Bangla are structurally so removed that they should not be considered dialects of the same language. This is an essentialist definition of 'a language', such as has been critiqued for historical purposes in Chapter 3. Unsurprisingly, the distinctive features he outlines for Asamiya in contrast with Bangla fail to distinguish between inherited and innovative features. Therefore, not all of the features he ascribes to Asamiya are diagnostic of the proto-Asamiya stage of linguistic history, but instead merely diagnose its Magadhan inheritance. The phonological and morphological features of Asamiya outlined by Kakati (*ibid.*: 8ff.) are as follows:[9]

- Asamiya "follows the pan-Indian system of penultimate stress and Bengali has initial stress". The Asamiya feature is not an innovation.
- The genitive case affix is /-er/ in Bangla and /-ɒr/ in Asamiya, with /-er/ maintained in an instrumental case suffix in Asamiya. This is a case of inherited variation with subsequent regularisation (cf. 3.4.1.4) and hence is not diagnostic of a propagation event (cf. 5.3.5).
- The locative affix in Asamiya is *-t* in contrast with Bangla *-te*. The innovation involved here is on the part of Bangla not Asamiya (see 5.3.7) and so this change is relevant to defining proto-Bangla, not proto-Asamiya (cf. 7.3.6 below).
- The present participle in Asamiya is /o˜ṭ/, Bangla has *-it-*. Early Asamiya has *-ante*. "The Pres. participle in Oṛiyā is *-anta-*, and both the [Asamiya] and [Oriya] forms go back to O.I.A. and M.I.A. active participle in *-ant-*" (*ibid.*: 361). This feature is inherited, and not diagnostic of an Asamiya propagation event. Incidentally, Chatterji reconstructs the Bangla suffix as derived from the same MIA source (1926: 999), with the /i/ element the result of transposition of an earlier feminine suffix (*ibid.*: 653-654).

[9] Kakati also lists some lexical distinctives of Asamiya in contrast with Bangla. However, this study does not include reconstruction of lexical innovations, and therefore it is beyond the scope of the present reconstruction to evaluate whether these lexical features constitute innovations, or features retained from an earlier Magadhan stage.

- A past conditional conjugation in Asamiya is "expressed by the post-position ɦɛ̃tɛn, *he˜ten* (earlier *ha˜te, hante*) after a fully conjugated verbal root in the past. Bengali expresses the past conditional with the pres. part. base in *-it-* with personal conjugational affixes" (Kakati 1962: 9). That is, the difference is between the construction of conditional sentences in Asamiya and Bangla. In Asamiya the consequent clause, or apodosis (and optionally the conditional clause, or protasis) are followed by /hɛ̃t̪ɛn/. For example, in modern Asamiya (from *ibid.*: 360): /tumi kɔle xi ahil hɛ̃t̪ɛn/ 'had you said, he would have come'. An example from early Asamiya writings (from *ibid.*):

  > *jadi āji gharata āchila* ***hante*** *svāmī,*
  > *tebe āni tomāka rākhilo* ***hante*** *āmi;* (Daityāri: *Śankara Carita*)
  > 'If my husband had been at home today, I would have taken you in and kept you'.

  Indeed this conditional construction using *hante* > /hɛ̃t̪ɛn/ is innovative, and distinct from functionally similar constructions in both KRNB and Bangla. Therefore *this* distinctive feature is diagnostic of an earlier stage of Asamiya linguistic history.

- The infinitive affix in Asamiya is derived from /-ib-/, while in Bangla it is derived from /-iṭ-/. The Asamiya morpheme is inherited in this function—cognate with KRNB and Oriya (cf. section 6.2.2)—and not diagnostic of proto-Asamiya.

- Asamiya "has a complete set of negative conjugation with the negative particle nɒ, *na-* placed before the verb root. Oriya has a negative conjugation with the verb substantive only. Bengali has no negative conjugation" (*ibid.*: 10). Going on cross-referenced portions of Kakati's work (*ibid.*: 383), what seems to be in view here is that in Asamiya the negative morpheme is always found before the verb, in contrast with Bangla and Oriya (and most of KRNB) where this morpheme generally follows the verb. This indeed could have been a propagated innovation, but the contact-related motivation for this change reduces its value for diagnosing a single propagation event (cf. Bhattacharya 1975).

- The plural nominative suffixes in SCA are distinctive and unique. However, they are not shared with western (Kamrupi) Asamiya (Goswami 1970), and thus are

not diagnostic of a common proto-Asamiya stage of linguistic history. The western Asamiya plural suffixes are instead cognate with KRNB and Bangla forms (cf. 5.4.3).

- Asamiya "pronominal derivatives of time and place seem to have no parallel formations in Bengali". At the very least, the pronominal derivatives of place discussed by Kakati (*ibid.*: 325ff.) do seem to constitute an innovative use of the locative affix within this pronominal set.
- In Asamiya, *a > ɒ / _Ca. This process of 'shortening' of non-stressed *a is very similar to that described in section 4.4.7 for western KRNB lects, and also found in Hindi and Bihari. With these connections further afield, it is unlikely that this change is diagnostic of a p-Asamiya propagation event.
- The distinctive symbol ৱ for the /w/ glide found in Asamiya has no counterpart in Bangla. This is an orthographic, and not a linguistic feature. It has no bearing on historical linguistic relations.

As editor to the second edition of Kakati's work, Golokchandra Goswami outlines further distinctive features of Asamiya in a footnote to Kakati (1962: 8), which are here paraphrased in the terms of this study:

- the alveolarisation of dental and postalveolar stops, resulting in the merger of these two series. This is a diagnostic innovation (cf. 4.3.6);
- the spirantisation of the laminal affricates (i.e. palatal series). The diagnostic value of this change is open to doubt (cf. 4.3.9);
- changes to the inherited sibilant (see 4.3.13). These changes are common with the eastern Bangla varieties, and seem to be related to contact with Tibeto-Burman varieties. As ecologically non-distinctive changes, they are not diagnostic of PEs (cf. 3.4.1.2).

Based on this critical evaluation of the evidence put forward by Kakati and Goswami in Kakati (1962), there are at least four changes (three morphological and one phonological) which diagnose a common Asamiya stage of historical development:

1) the innovative past conditional construction;

2) the prefixed negative particle;

3) the locational pronominals;

4) the merger of dental and postalveolar stops;

None of these changes are common with KRNB beyond Bongaigaon. It seems therefore that they were innovated after the split of proto-Kamta from proto-Kamrupa in the 13th century. For the purpose of this study it is not necessary to be any more specific regarding the chronology of the proto-Asamiya changes, other than to establish that they are phylogenetically parallel to the proto-Kamta changes described in section 7.3.1.

7.3.6. The proto-Gauḍa-Baŋga (Bangla) speech community

Similarly to the grouping of Asamiya with KRNB, the Bangla lects have been grouped together for primarily historical-political rather than historical-linguistic reasons, with little evidence presented by way of common linguistic innovations. The key historical reconstruction is Chatterji (1926) who writes:

> Political and social reasons have brought about the present unity of speech in Bengal, despite the fact of dialects. From the time of the Pālas [of Gauḍ], the greater part of Bengal formed portions of one empire. Gauḍa and Vaŋga are frequently spoken of together, Gauḍa meaning North Central Bengal [south and south-west of Kamata and Kamrupa—MT], and the Western part of the Delta, and Vaŋga including not only Bengal beyond the Brahmaputra, but also a considerable part of the Delta. … If it had not been brought about by some sort of political union under the Pālas just when the foundations of the Bengali language were laid, and by the dispersion of a well-organised Brahman community all over Bengal, and Kāyastha participation in their efforts, the evolution of a common nationality and of one type of culture and literature among the people of heterogeneous origin in West Bengal, in East Bengal, in North Bengal, would have been extremely problematic (*ibid.*: 146-147).

Chatterji postulated there to be four dialects "of Bengali": Rāḍha, Varêndra, Vaŋga, and Kāmrupa. His tabulation of the historical relations between these lects (*ibid.*: 140) is reproduced in Figure 7-3.

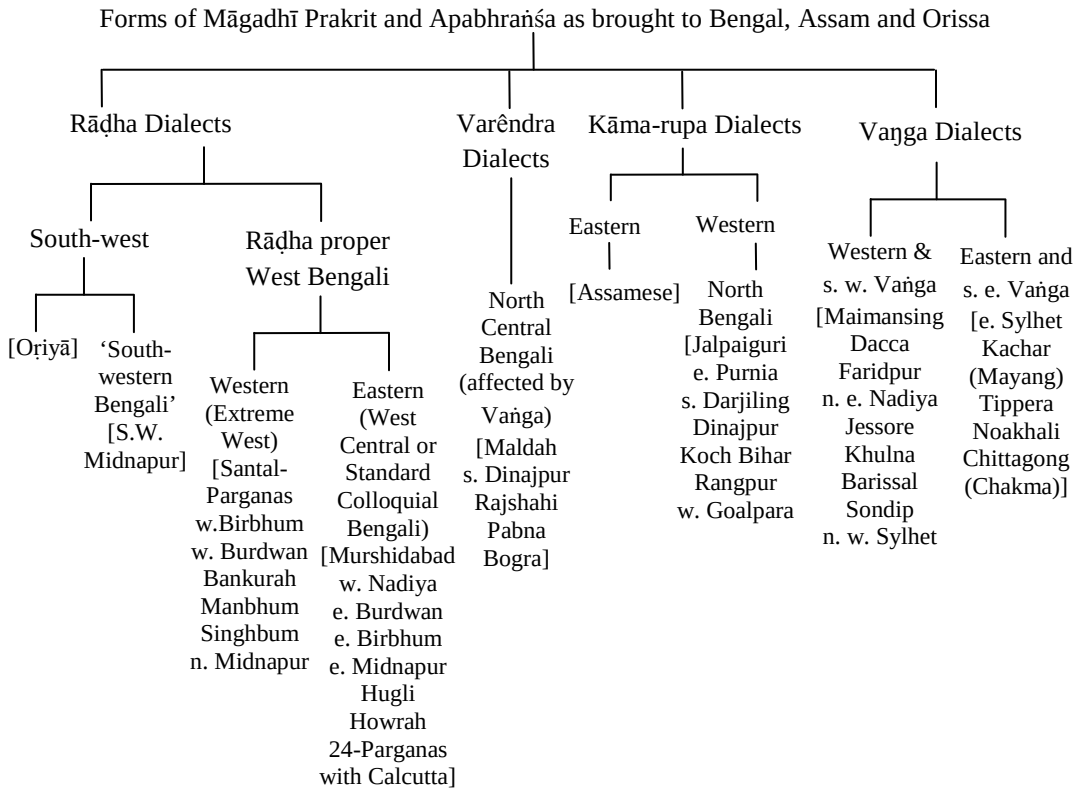


Figure 7-3. Chatterji's (1926) tabulation of the historical linguistic relations between eastern Magadhan lects

Note that Chatterji's classification of 'Bengali dialects' includes lects ancestral to both Asamiya and Oriya. However, Chatterji does not intend to classify these lects as dialects of Bangla. Therefore, Chatterji's four dialects—Rāḍha, Varêndra, Vaŋga, and Kāmrupa—should not be termed "dialects of Bengali" but rather, "dialects of eastern Magadhan" (cf. *ibid.*: 92ff.).

The question that remains to be answered is this: did Chatterji articulate a set of innovations that are diagnostic of a proto-Bangla speech community and its language? (Or, to be more historically accurate, a proto-Gauḍa-Baŋga SC, see below). The position Chatterji articulates on the origins of Bengali is summarised in the following paragraph:

> The Bengali dialects cannot be referred to a single Primitive Bengali Speech, but they are derived from various local forms of late Māgadhī Apabhraṅśa, which developed some common characteristics that may be called pan-Bengali : *e.g.*, «-ila, -iba » for the past and future base, rather than «-ala, -aba » ; «-iā » rather than simple «-i » for the conjunctive ; «-ēra < -kēra » besides «-ara < -kara » for the genitive ; «-kē, -rē » for the dative, rather than «-ku » as in Oṛiyā : etc. These pan-Bengali features link the dialects together as members of a single group, and enabled them to be attached to a composite literary language as a matter of course (*ibid.*: 139).

Here Chatterji gives a set of features, which if they did "link the dialects together as members of a single group" would constitute evidence for a proto-Gauḍa-Baŋga stage of linguistic history. The putative "pan-Bengali" features are examined in turn:

- /-il-/ 'Past' and /-ib-/ 'Future'. These characterise eastern Magadhan as a whole, not just Bangla, and hence are pertinent to section 7.3.2 and proto-e.Mg., rather than the reconstruction of proto-Bangla *per se*.
- /-ia/ 'Conjunctive', or, 'perfect participle'. This is found also in KRNB, early Asamiya and possibly early Maithili (cf. section 6.2.1). Analogously to the situation in early Asamiya, Jha (1985 [1958]: 513) gives *iā* as one of several variant forms found as conjunctive in early Maithili literature, though it has been replaced in the modern language. It seems doubtful therefore that the extension of inherited *-i by *-a is uniquely diagnostic of a proto-Bangla (Gauḍa-Baŋga) stage.[10]
- /-er/ 'Genitive'. As argued in section 5.3.5, the presence of this form is a case of *inherited variation with subsequent regularisation.* Such changes are not diagnostic of a propagation event (cf. 3.4.1.4).
- /-ke, -re/ 'Dative'. This extension of the inherited dative suffix by the locative-instrumental has been discussed in section 5.3.6, and is supportive, rather than diagnostic of a propagation event.

[10] Incidentally, this feature is a good illustration of Croft's argument for why an essentialist, or structural-based definition of 'a language' will not do for linguistic phylogeny (cf. 3.2.2). The SCB (standard colloquial Bangla) itself no longer has its conjunctive in /-ia/, having been fused into /-e/. If 'Bangla' were defined (on an essentialist model) in terms of this feature, even SCB would no longer qualify as 'Bangla'!

None of these features can do the job for us of diagnosing a proto-Gauḍa-Baŋga speech community and language, because none of the innovations pass the diagnostics developed in this study to sift single propagation events from possible cases of parallel independent development. However, certain diagnostic innovations unique to Bangla have shown up in the course of this study of KRNB, and no doubt several more would emerge from an in-depth comparison of the Bangla lects. These changes are not shared with KRNB. The diagnostic changes identified by this study are:

[MI 1.] > /-d̪-/ 'PL.OBL.AN' {SCB} (before 1500 AD). Diagnostic.

[MI 3.] /-[e]ra/ 'PL.NOM' in pronouns > /-[e]ra/ 'PL.NOM.AN' in general nominal morphology {Bangla} (by the 15th century). Diagnostic.

[MI 7.] *-[ɔ]ṭɔ 'LOC' + *-ɛ 'LOC-INS' > /-ṭe/ 'LOC' {SCB, Man. P} (before 1400 AD.). Probably diagnostic.

The textual evidence given by Chatterji points to a dating of these innovations before 1500 AD in the case of two changes, and before 1400 AD in the case of the other (cf. Chapter 5). As such, these innovations are diagnostic of a propagation event which is phylogenetically parallel with the proto-Kamta and proto-eKamrupa(Asamiya) stages of linguistic history reconstructed in section 7.3.1 and 7.3.5 respectively. We lack as yet a *terminus post quem* for the proto-Gauḍa-Vaŋga stage of linguistic development.

The proto-speech community and language diagnosed by these innovations is here termed as 'proto-Gauḍa-Baŋga' based on Chatterji's observation that, historically, "Gauḍa and Vaŋga are frequently spoken of together" (1926: 146; Vaŋga can alternatively be Romanised as Baŋga which better shows the connection with modern "Banga-la"). The term "Bangla" and "Bengali" are more recent terms to denote the language and speech of the region. Indeed up until the 19th century it was more common for this language and its dialects to be referred to as "Gauḍa" than "Bangla" (Chatterji 1926: 148-149).[11]

[11] Note that *Baŋga* is a Romanised transliteration of বংগ and the vowels are pronounced [ɔ] not [a], thus [bɔŋgɔ].

7.3.7. The division of proto-Magadhan

It has been argued above that several stages of the linguistic history of eastern NIA which previously have been taken for granted are yet to be thoroughly established by sufficiently broad and methodologically robust historical reconstruction. Further historical studies are needed that take up the task of reconstructing propagation events and speech community events for proto-Kamrupa (the putative ancestor of Asamiya and KRNB), proto-eastern Magadhan (the putative ancestor of Bangla, Oriya, Asamiya and KRNB as well as others), and indeed proto-Magadhan itself. This study has taken the broadest of these subgroups for granted—proto-Magadhan—and has reconstructed the divergence of proto-speech communities and their languages out of this parent speech. The results are shown in Figure 7-4 in accordance with the adjusted phylogenetic tree model outlined in section 3.4.4. In this figure, 'p-' as in 'p-Kamta' means 'the proto-speech community and its language' as defined in 3.2 in terms of PEs that resulted from speaker interaction. '?p-Kamrupa', which is shown as the ancestor of both p-Kamta and p-eKamrupa (Asamiya) is prefixed with a question mark, as is '?p-Gauda-Kamrupa', to remind the reader that these hypothetical stages are less robustly established in this reconstruction than the other proto-speech communities.

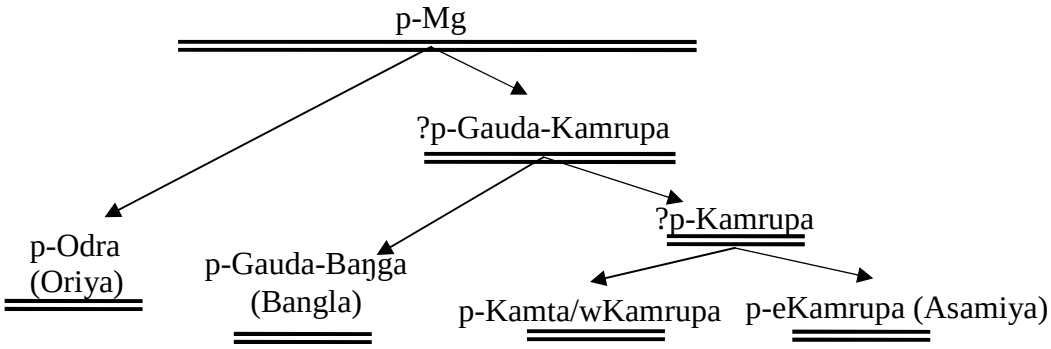


Figure 7-4. The historical fragmentation of proto-Mg into its linguistic descendants

Notice that p-Gauda-Baŋga, p-Odra (Oriya) and p-Kamta did not undergo major phonological innovations during this early NIA period, though p-eKamrupa (Asamiya) did. The proto-stages and phylogenetic relations for this period of linguistic history are diagnosed on the basis of morphological or morphologically-conditioned changes. The historical scenario reconstructed above (so far just up to

1550 AD) is of the fragmentation of the Magadhan speech community and its language into several proto-SCs and protolanguages, with proto-Kamta one of those fragments.

7.4. The middle KRNB period: c.1550-1787 AD

From here our story focuses on the history of KRNB lects, and the other Magadhan lects enter the discussion only as they contribute to PEs in KRNB linguistic history.

Proto-Kamta took its inheritance from ?p-Kamrupa (and before that from ?p-Gauda-Kamrupa), innovated the unique features outlined above during 1250-1550 AD, and then split into three main sections (Western, Central, Eastern) as will be shown below. This division of the speech community was plausibly caused by the rapid socio-political expansion, and then fragmentation, of the Koch-Kamta kingdom in the 16th Century (see above). The Koch-Kamta kingdom did not long maintain its supremacy over the conquered areas. The Mughal empire was expanding from the west through Bihar, and from the south through Bengal. To the east the Ahom kingdom had been re-established and control of Kamrup and Goalpara was to change hands several times between the Ahom and Koch kingdoms.[12]

The period 1550-1787 AD is marked by two concurrent phenomena: (i) local innovations arose which define distinct and localised propagation events, and (ii) wider changes, common to many NIA lects, also spread across the KRNB area. These two sorts of PE—local vs. wide-range—and the different SCEs that caused them, are reconstructed in sections 7.4.1-7.4.4. In order to aid the reader in following the arguments below, the tree model of this period of KRNB linguistic history is given in Figure 7-5, in advance of the argument. The dotted line indicates the propagation of [PI 9.] across p-Gauda-Baŋga, p-cKRNB, etc., but not across p-wKRNB. Proto-w.KRNB is prefixed by a question mark to indicate that this stage is not well established at present. Arrows indicate the chronological relations reconstructed in this study.

[12] Kamrupa [kamrupɔ]> Kamrup [kamrup] due to loss of final vowel, cf. PI 38.

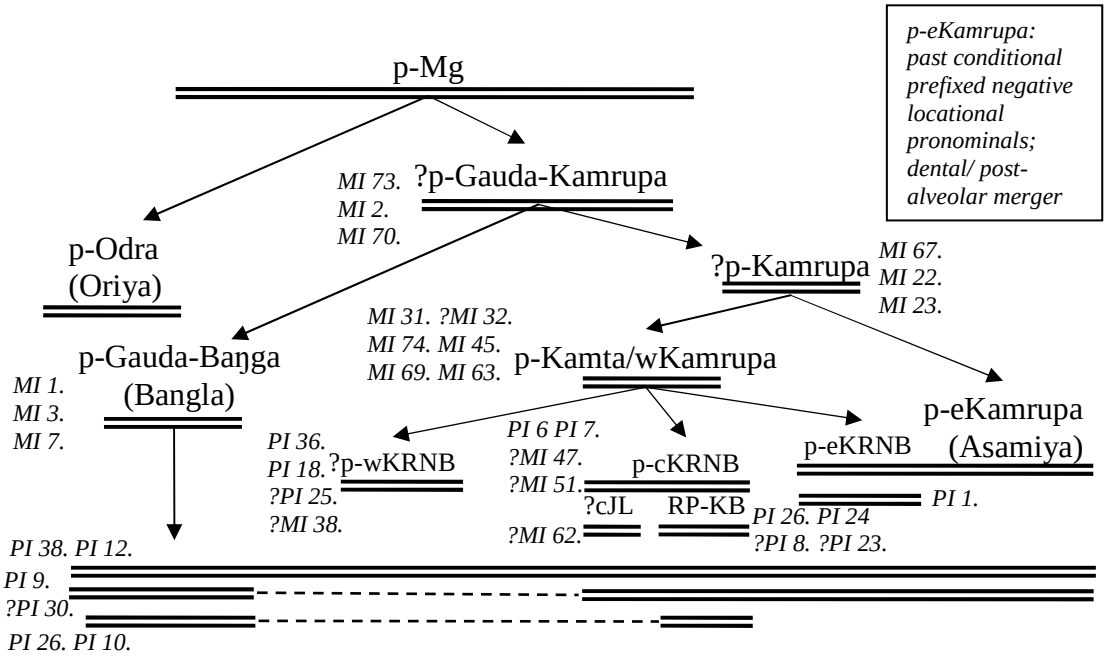


Figure 7-5. The division of proto-Kamta, and re-integration with some other NIA lects (1550-1787 AD)

The intended meaning of this diagram, to be defended below, is that the proto-Kamta SC and its language was split into three distinct SCs which underwent more localised PEs. The easternmost SC (here labelled p-eKRNB) underwent innovations in common with p-eKamrupa(Asamiya) speakers to the east, and by this propagation event established an ongoing pattern of closer phylogenetic relations with Asamiya than with the other KRNB lects. The other two descendants of p-Kamta underwent unique local innovations, as well as participated in changes that had a wider-range and significance in NIA. For example, p-cKRNB underwent [PI 9.]—the change of breathy to modal voicing in sonarants—in common with Bangla, Asamiya and Oriya. During this same period, all of KRNB underwent the loss of final *ɔ, which is a widely shared NIA change. The changes with broader range across NIA are examined in section 7.4.4.

7.4.1. Sequencing the 'central' KRNB Propagation Networks

The most complex array of isogloss boundaries within the KRNB area is found in a geographical 'corridor' approximately 50 kilometres wide which separates the western and 'central' KRNB speech communities.[13] This area of criss-crossing

[13] The inverted commas will not be repeated throughout, but are used here to draw attention to the intended meaning of 'central' as *geographically medial*, and not *more important* than the others. An

boundaries of propagation events is termed here as KRNB's 'western corridor of change'. The main phonological and morphological innovations whose ranges of propagation falter within this corridor, are given in Figure 7-6.[14] The isogloss boundaries are labelled, and the key explains whether the innovation is found to the east (marked by 'e') or to the west (marked by 'w') of the boundary line. A summary of the linguistic character of each innovation is also given; the details are found in earlier chapters.

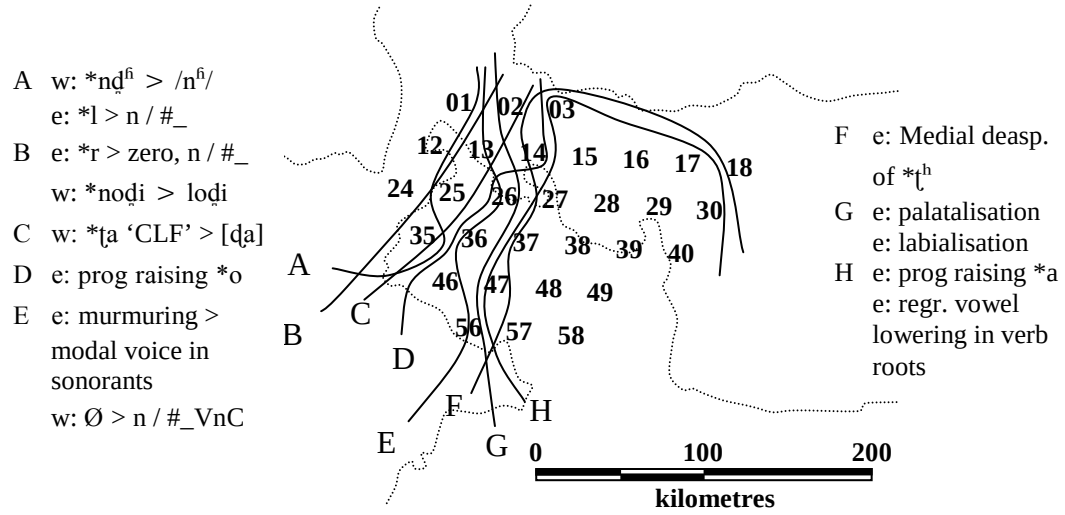


Figure 7-6. Isogloss boundaries in KRNB's western corridor of change

At this point in the historical reconstruction there are two methodological alternatives open to us. Confronted by such a complex dialectological pattern of innovations we might determine this to be the limit beyond which linguistic history cannot be reconstructed. After all, the relative chronology of these innovations cannot be established on linguistic grounds, because in general these changes do not bleed or feed each another (cf. 3.4.3.1), or on textual grounds, because in general these lects lack a written record which might guide the reconstruction of chronology (cf. 3.4.3.2). If this is the limit beyond which historical linguistic reconstruction is impossible, then it makes sense to either (a) focus exclusively on the history of written languages, which afford us more opportunities to disambiguate chronologies

alternative term could be 'midlands KRNB', analogous to the use of 'midlands NIA' rather than 'central NIA' to refer to Hindi etc., cf. e.g. Masica (1991).

[14] For more detailed analysis of the individual isoglosses see further below; for the data on which these isoglosses are based, see Appendix E; for the experimental design and method used in data collection, see Chapter 2.

of changes; or (b) conclude the study with a dialectological map, rather than an historical account—with a wave model, rather than a tree model. This statement summarises the present position of historical linguistic research in Indo-Aryan. The major studies (e.g. Chatterji 1926, Kakati 1962) focus on the lects with a tradition of written literature; the historical documents providing evidence (though not without some problems) as to the chronology of changes in spoken vernaculars over the centuries. Maniruzzaman (1977), who, on the other hand, departs from the focus on written lects to reconstruct the history of 'five dialects of Bengali', concludes without an historical account of the chronology of changes, but with a map of isogloss boundaries.

I have suggested in this study that in addition to linguistic seriation and textual sequencing of changes, there may be *sociohistorical* grounds for disambiguating the chronology of linguistic changes. Step V of the sociohistorical framework for historical linguistic reconstruction developed in section 3.4.3.3 is reproduced below so as to guide the sequencing of changes in KRNB's western corridor:

V. Consider (i) the possible permutations of SCEs (divisions and integrations) which would account for the disjunction in PNs, (ii) the relative sociohistorical plausibility of each possible permutation, and (iii) the relative sociohistorical plausibility of a SCE as against the co-existence of the PNs within a complex SC. Accordingly, reconstruct the chronology of PEs by selecting the most plausible sociohistorical explanation.

It has been argued in section 7.3.1 above that the old (or proto-)Kamta period of 1250-1550 was closed, and the middle KRNB period of 1550-1787 inaugurated, by division of the SC in conjunction with socio-political and linguistic expansion. Following this division, the three possibilities of (1) SC division, (2) SC (re)integration, and (3) coexisting PNs within a complex SC come into play and must be compared and evaluated for sociohistorical plausibility. If the linguistic history was characterised primarily by *divisions* after the proto-Kamta period, then the innovation with the greatest range would have been the 'first cab off the rank', followed by other changes in order of decreasing range. The hypothesis of *division*

entails sequencing isoglosses A and B as historically prior to isoglosses G and H, in Figure 7-6. If, however, the linguistic history was characterised primarily by *reintegration* of partially differentiated SCs (after the initial division of the proto-Kamta SC and its language), then isoglosses G and H would have preceded A and B. The third possibility is that the SC that developed after the division of p-Kamta was so complex in its network structure that it sustained contemporaneous networks with ranges A, B, G, H and so on.

I will argue below that the old course of river Tista shaped the division of p-Kamta into central and western PNs, but that a later change to the course of this river, coupled with district reorganisation, led to a reintegration between portions of central and western KRNB. This account of division-followed-by-partial-reintegration (option 2 above) is more plausible than the other two sociohistorical possibilities given what we know of the social history of the area. The problem with SC division-followed-by-further-division (option 1 above) as a sociohistorical explanation is that, prior to the shift of the river's course in 1787, there is no record of sociohistorical conditions which would account for isoglosses A and B as Propagation Networks. However, such sociohistorical conditions emerged *after the river shifted* due to the socio-political reorganisation that occurred during the colonial period. The third sociohistorical possibility, of a complex SC accounting simultaneously for all the PNs in the western corridor of change, is also problematic because the old course of the river (which most probably conditioned isoglosses G and H) only overlapped with the reorganised district boundaries for a decade. It is unlikely that all these isoglosses are the result of propagation during a single decade. Much more likely is the hypothesis that the isoglosses reflecting colonially-reorganised districts diagnose a Propagation Network of interaction which *replaced* the older PN after the change in river course erased an earlier boundary to interaction.

In order to unpack this sociohistorical argument, section 7.4.1.1 explores the sociohistorical conditioning for the eastern edge of KRNB's western corridor of change, and the same is done for the western edge in section 7.4.1.2.

7.4.1.1. The eastern limit of KRNB's western corridor of change

The eastern limit of this corridor of change may be defined by isoglosses F, G and H. The fuller representation of the dialect data for each of these changes is given in Figures 7-7 to 7-11. The data are found in Appendix E. Dark shading in the figures below indicates the categorical, or near-categorical presence of the change in the data collected at the site in question. That is, there was little or no variability found with respect to this feature during the interviews with speakers at this site. Light shading (as in Figure 7-8) indicates that the change is variable in the data for that site.

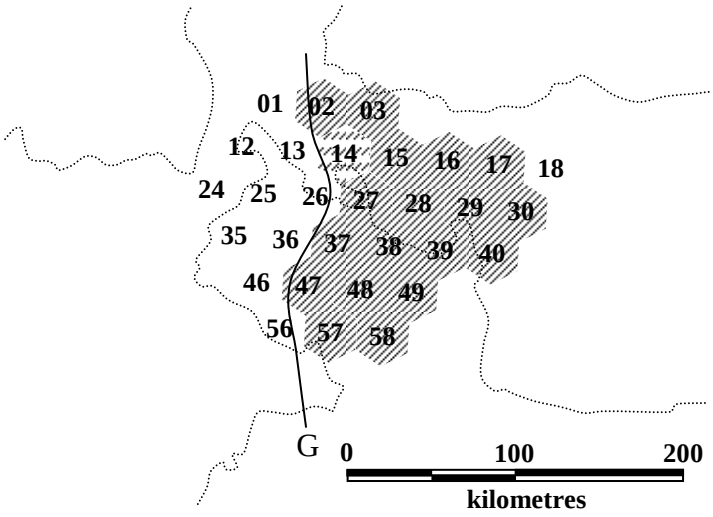


Figure 7-7. Dialect geography of [PI 6.] (palatalisation [i_a])[15]

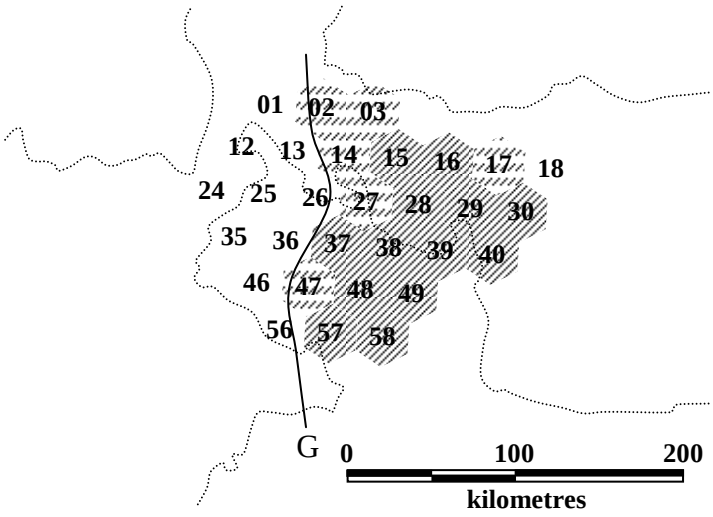


Figure 7-8. Dialect geography of [PI 7.] (labialisation/palatalisation [u_a])[16]

[15] See items 2, 3, 4, 5 and 17 in Appendix E.
[16] See items 1, 7, 10 and 22 in Appendix E.

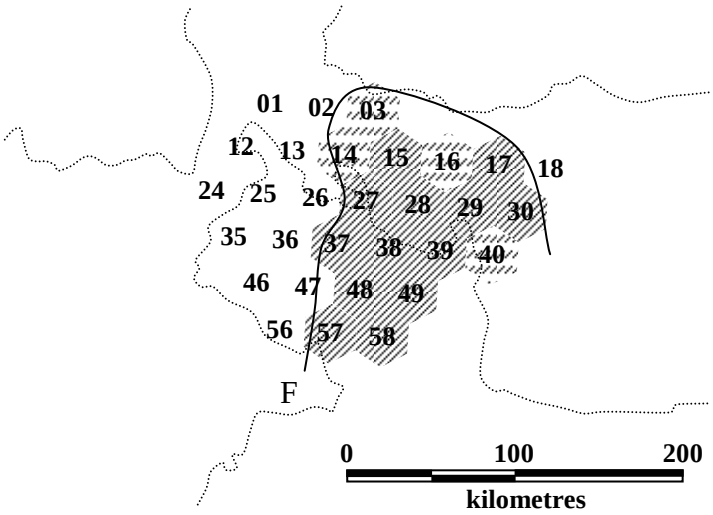


Figure 7-9. Dialect geography of [PI 10.] (medial deasp. of *tʰ)[17]

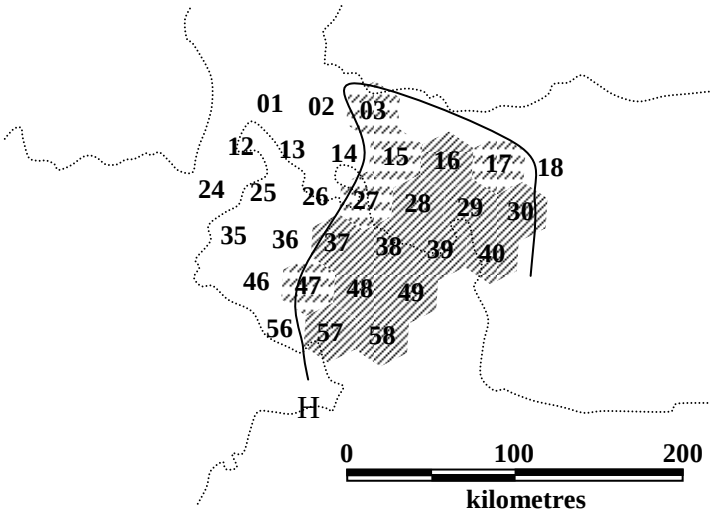


Figure 7-10. Dialect geography of [PI 24.] (progressive raising of *a)[18]

[17] See items 11, 12, 17 and 25 in Appendix E.
[18] See items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 10, 17 and 22 in Appendix E.

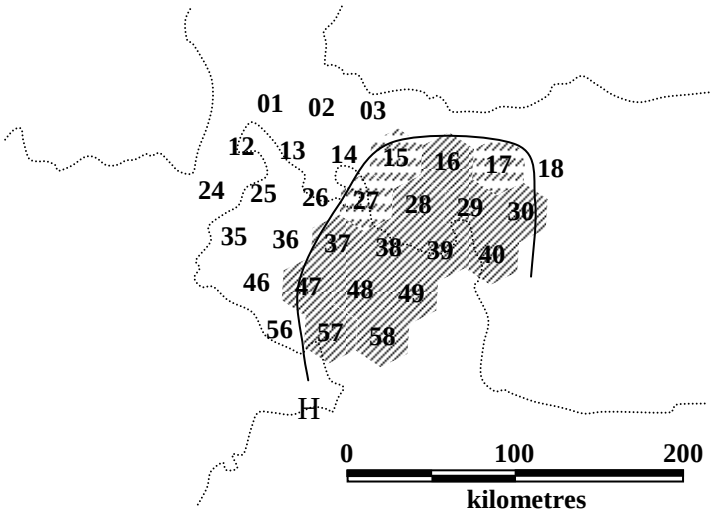


Figure 7-11. Dialect geography of [PI 26.] (regr. vowel lowering in verb roots)[19]

The geographical extent of propagation of these innovations along the western corridor does not correspond with contemporary socio-political, geographical or social boundaries, but with the *old course of the Tista river course*. This old river ran from north to south, and was, until around 1787 AD, the most marked geographical phenomenon, and the most enduring political boundary, of the KRNB area. R. C. Majumdar & J. N. Sarkar (1943) and others, observing that the Tista ran due south from Jalpaiguri in three streams—the Karatoya, the Atrai and the Purnabhaha—derive the name Tista from Tri-srota ('three streams' in Sanskrit). Clark (1969) explains the relation between the old Tista and Karatoya rivers:

> The history of the paradelta shows that the Karatoyā and the Tista have been closely associated. The Tista flowed into the Karatoyā, giving that river much of its size and power during the years it served as an ethnic and political boundary. Since it carries the run off from the high rainfall (120-150 inches yearly) Sikkim Himalayas, it has always been as Spate points out, an "exceptionally violent" river, and has frequent devastating floods during the monsoon season (Clarke 1969: 98).[20]

As mentioned by Clarke, not only was the river a major geographical phenomenon, it also functioned as an ethnic and political boundary at several points in the history of the region. During early medieval times, this river formed the boundary between the kingdoms of Kamrupa and Gauda. It also formed the boundary between the Koch and

[19] See items 35, 37 and 38 in Appendix E.
[20] The reference is to Spate *et al.* (1954).

Gaur kingdoms before the expansion made by Biswa Singha's sons (Whyte 2002: 25). After the fragmentation of the greater Koch kingdom, for a time it separated the Koch kingdom from Mughal Bengal (Nathan 1936, trans. by M. I. Borah: 804; cf. S.N. Bhattacharya 1943: 241).

In contrast with its historical importance, the Atrai river is today but a small stream which nonetheless preserves the channel through which this major regional river used to flow. Test sites 26 and 47, shown in the Figures above, are located within a few kilometres of what we understand that historical course to have been. Isogloss boundary G runs right along this old course from north to south; boundaries F and H also run along the same course, dividing sites 56, 36 and 26 from sites 57, 37 and 27, and slightly less precisely dividing between sites 46 and 48. Boundaries F and H differ from boundary G principally by not extending all the way north along the river course to sites 02, 03 and 14. The north-south course of the Tista river system is shown by the maps in Figure 7-1 and Figure 7-2, reproduced from Whyte (2002), and is also included in the maps in Ahmed (1936).

As reported by the Gazetteers, large earthquakes and floods during 1787 AD had a major impact on the course and unity of the Tista river system, effectively splitting a major river into several smaller rivers.

> Before 1787, the Atrai was one of the great rivers of North Bengal for through this channel the Tista used to discharge its water into the Padma [Ganga]. But in 1787, a great flood took place and changes occurred in the river system of this region. This was also due to earthquakes and earth movement. As a result, the Tista broke away from its old channel and found a new and capacious channel south-eastward and joined the Brahmaputra (Jamuna) … Since then the Atrai has [lost] its former importance, but [is] still navigable by large country boats during the rainy season (Bangladesh District Gazetteers, Rajshahi, 1976: 3, cited in S. Islam 1992:7).

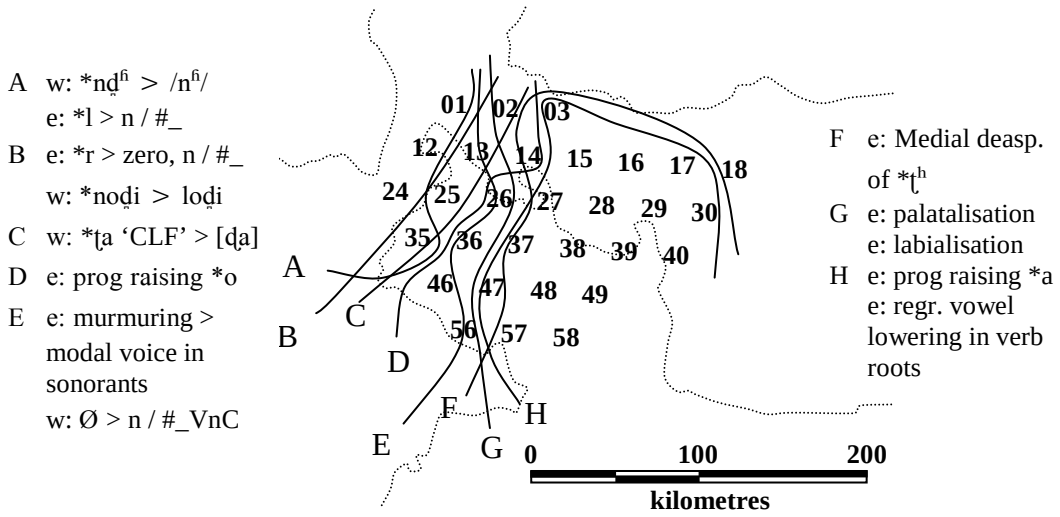
This event had a catastrophic effect on the lives of the inhabitants of the low lying flood-plains. Clarke (1969) cites Henry Frowde's statement in the Imperial Gazetteer of India that *one sixth of the local population died in the disaster*.

On the one hand then, we have the geographical course of the River Tista-Karatoya-Atrai which was a pre-modern political boundary and ran north to south until 1787 AD; on the other, we have the dialect geography of several innovations which (1) are diagnostic of PEs, and (2) share substantial portions of their western boundary with this old course of River Tista. Based on these correspondences in geography, I propose that the river Tista was, before its division, a sufficient boundary to interaction between speakers living on either side that local changes propagated among speakers on one side were not adopted by speakers on the other side. It may be mentioned in support of this argument that (1) the rivers of today's north Bengal are in general fast running, and among them the Tista is at times "exceptionally violent" (see quote from Clarke on page 313); (2) the previous channel of River Tista was considerably wider than any of the present day rivers of north Bengal (not including the Brahmaputra in the east); and (3) this major river also functioned as a socio-political boundary at several points in the history of the region before its shift in course.

A causal connection between (a) the zone of interaction bounded by the old course of River Tista and (b) the propagation of innovations shown in Figures 7-7 to 7-11, provides a *terminus ante quem* for the associated innovations. The shift in Tista's course would have resulted in a major restructuring of patterns of social interaction across North Bengal and the Koch Behar kingdom. For the old course of Tista to have so precisely conditioned the extent of propagation of linguistic changes, *those changes must have been propagated prior to the change in the river's course*. The easternmost limit of the corridor of change is accordingly dated as prior to 1787 AD (when the river shifted).

7.4.1.2. The western limit of KRNB's western corridor of change

The western limit of the corridor runs not in a north-south direction but from north-east to south-west, and may be defined by the isoglosses A, B and C of Figure 7-6, repeated here for ease of reference.



Reproduction of Figure 7-6. Isogloss boundaries in KRNB's western corridor of change

Fuller representation of the ranges of these PNs are given in Figures 7-12 to 7-16. The solid shading in the figures below (which contrasts with diagonal shading) indicates the presence of the innovation in the wordlist data collected at RL, KS and MH during the first stage of fieldwork (cf. Chapter 2).

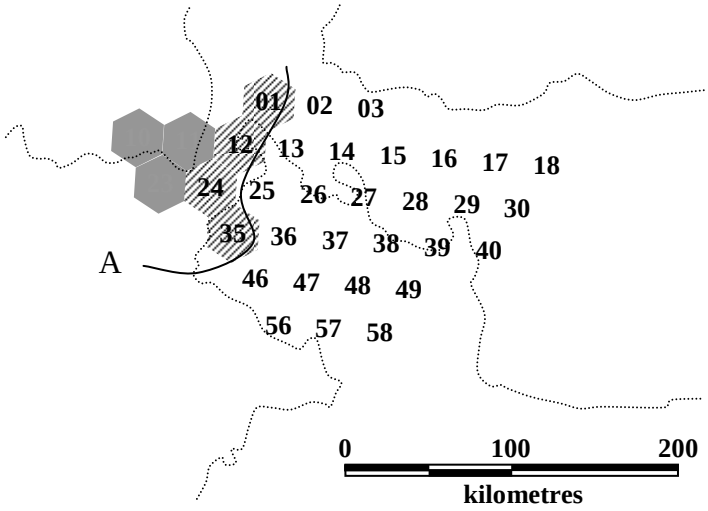


Figure 7-12. Dialect geography of [PI 17.] (*nd̪ʱ > /nʱ/)[21]

[21] See item 37 in Appendix E. This change is supportive, but not diagnostic of a PE (cf. 4.3.12).

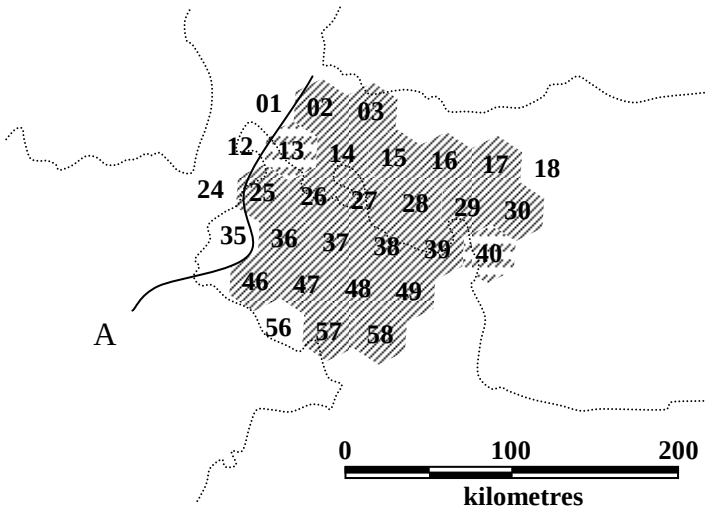


Figure 7-13. Dialect geography of [PI 14.] (initial *l > /n/)[22]

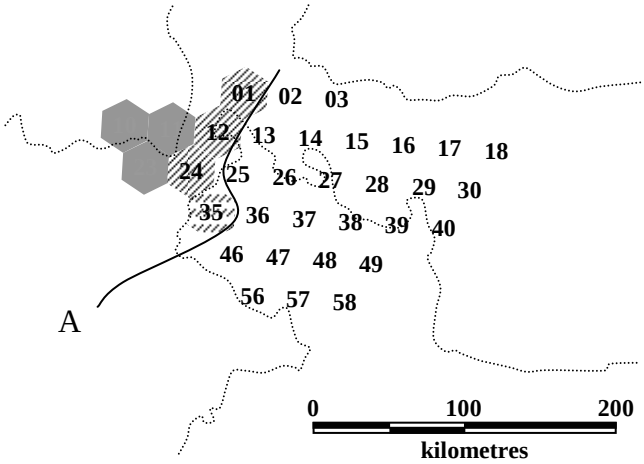


Figure 7-14. Dialect geography of initial *n > /l/[23]

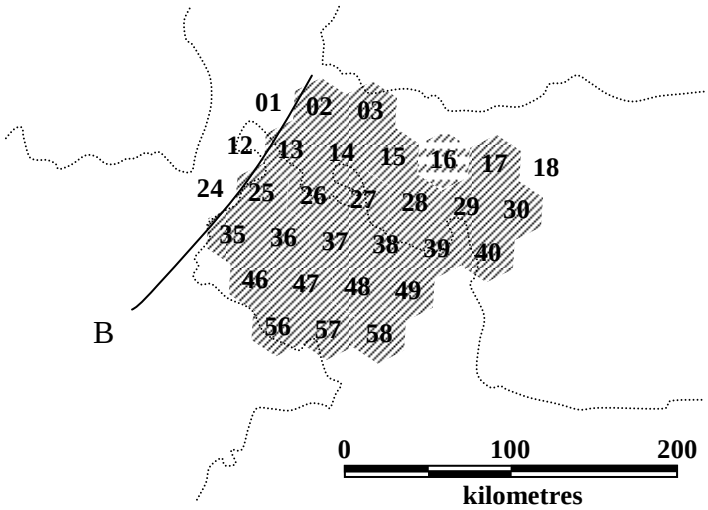


Figure 7-15. Dialect geography of [PI 15.] (initial *r > zero)[24]

[22] See item 12 in Appendix E. [PI 14.] is not a diagnostic change (cf. 4.3.11), but as the range is almost identical as that of [PI 15.] (which is diagnostic), it is likely that they resulted from a single propagation event.

[23] See item 13 in Appendix E.

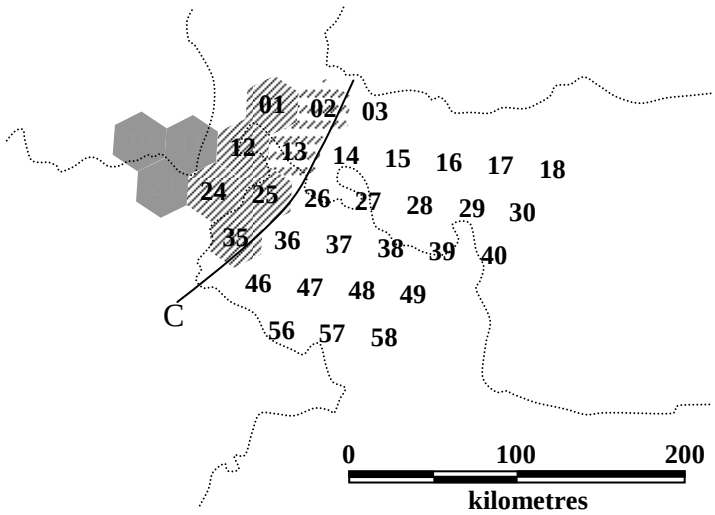


Figure 7-16. Dialect geography of *ʈa 'CLF' > [ɖa] / C[sonorant] _ [25]

The range of propagation of these innovations does not appear to correspond with any geographical features, but rather with the social and political boundaries set up by the British after they secured control of the region in 1773 AD. Notice that the ranges of PNs shown in Figures 7-13 to 7-17 divide sites 1, 12 and 24 (and 35 except for PI 15) on the north-west, from other sites to the east and south. Compare this division with that shown in Figure 7-17 between Bihar in the north-west and Rangpur and Dinajpur districts of Bengal in the east and south. The pertinent sections of the socio-political division in the Figure are overlayed with a heavy dotted line.

[24] See item 14 *[rɔʃuɳɔ, rɛʃuɳɔ, lɛʃuɳɔ] 'garlic' in Appendix E, which is a Tadbhava word. The variant collected at site 16 is /neʃun/ which seems to be derived from *lɛʃuɳɔ rather than *rɛʃuɳɔ. Hence, neither loss nor retention of initial *r is attested by this item. The hexagon is shaded in Figure 7-15 because the wordlist data collected within a few kilometres of site 16 shows variable loss of initial *r.

[25] See item 53 in Appendix E.

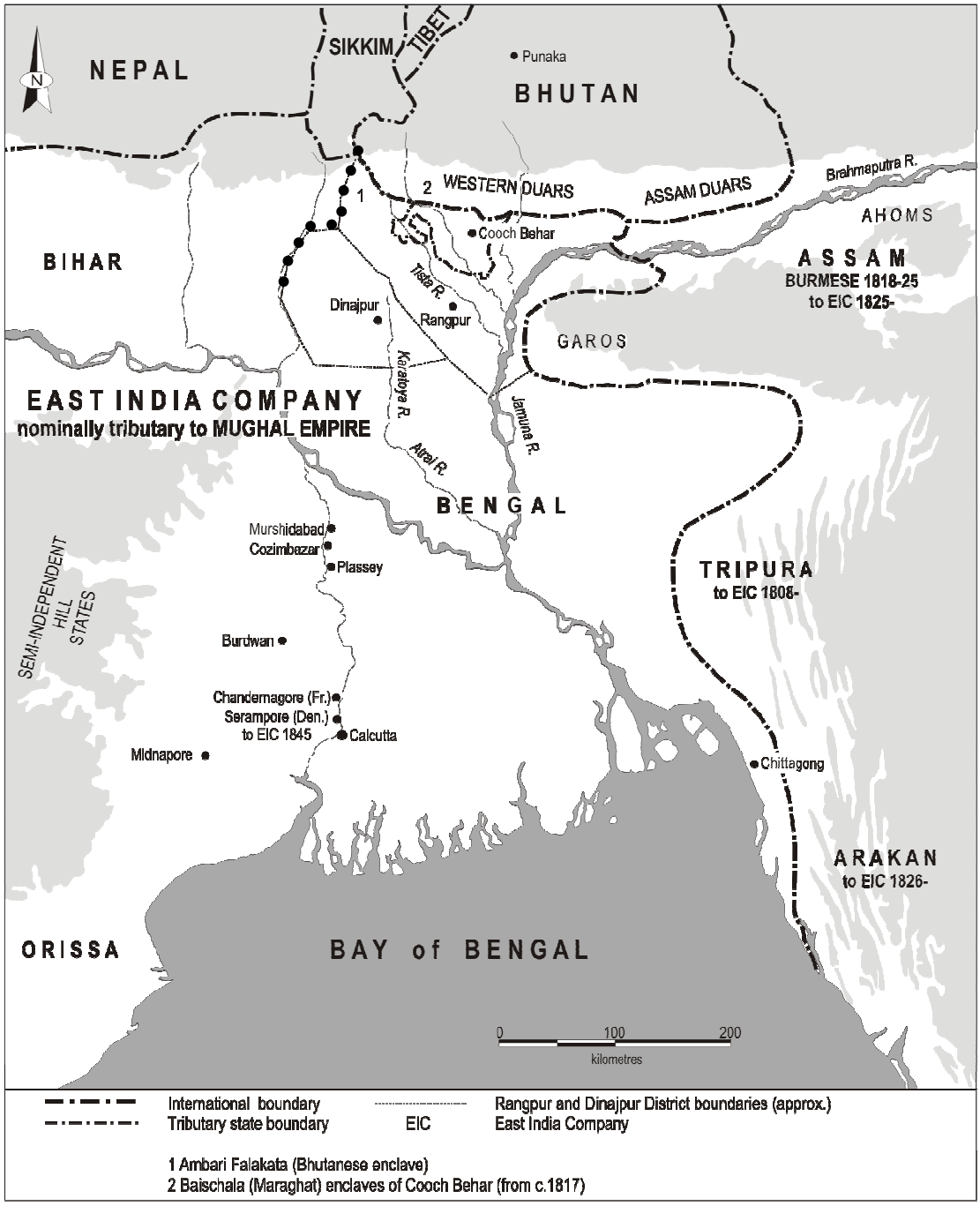


Figure 7-17. Cooch Behar through History: c.1775—After the First Anglo-Bhutanese War (reproduced from Whyte 2002: 461)

These socio-political boundaries do not seem to extend back in history beyond the seizing of colonial authority by the British in 1773 AD. The district of Dinajpur (Dinagepour) is shown in James Rennell's 1781 Bengal Atlas with boundaries similar to those shown in Figure 7-17 (reproduced in Rennell & Ambashthya 1975). The western limit of Dinajpur at that time followed a small river called the Nagar (Nagore) river, which today forms the international border between West Bengal and Bangladesh (shown in Figures 7-12 to 7-16).

However, prior to the British, this river did not form a socio-political boundary between administrative divisions. On the contrary, the river Nagar flowed directly through the centre of the Sarkar (Mughal equivalent of a district) called Tajpur (see Habib 1982: plate 11). The western boundary of Tajpur Sarkar was the Mahananda river, which lies 30-40 kilometres to the west of the isoglosses shown in Figures 7-12 to 7-16. The Mahananda river runs south from the eastern border of Nepal, which is shown in those Figures. The eastern boundary of Tajpur Sarkar lay between the rivers Nagar and (the much greater) Tista. In short, the western limit of KRNB's western corridor of change corresponds very poorly with the Mughal administrative divisions, and much more neatly with the British reorganisation of districts.

I propose a causal correspondence between the lines of district organisation during the British and independent periods—shaping patterns of social interaction between villages and their municipal and district headquarters—and the extent of propagation for the innovations shown in Figures 7-12 to 7-16. The same patterns of propagation were not seen in the earlier set of changes (Figures 7-7 to 7-11), for the simple reason that the structures of social organisation and interaction *changed at the end of the 18th century* as a result of (1) the shift in course of River Tista, and (2) the advent of colonial administration.

The British administered district boundaries, established in the second half of the 18th century, are the most probable sociohistorical cause for the western limit of the western corridor of change. However, the impact of this administrative reorganisation on patterns of social interaction and linguistic performance would hardly have been instantaneous. It probably took a few generations for the new socio-political boundaries to stamp their mark on patterns of interaction and linguistic propagation.

The impact of the administrative reorganisation on speaker interaction would have been exacerbated by the catastrophic events of 1787 AD (cf. 7.4.1.1). An earthquake and flooding which killed one sixth of the local population would have caused major destruction of villages and so led to considerable rebuilding of lives within the region. The rebuilding would have been both of physical things like houses and farms, but also social things such as re-finding family. It is plausible that this rebuilding phase

sped up the process of reshaping patterns of social interaction (and hence propagation events) along the new district lines.

7.4.1.3. Results of the sociohistorical sequencing of 'central' KRNB PNs

Recall the shape of the argument for sociohistorical sequencing developed in 3.4.3.3:

If PNs are reconstructed with a disjunction in their ranges,

And SCE is, on balance, more sociohistorically plausible than the co-existence of these PNs within a complex SC,

And a particular directionality of SCE (i.e. either SC division or integration) is more plausible for sociohistorical reasons,

Then this plausible directionality of the SCE also supports a particular sequencing of the PEs.

In the case of KRNB's western corridor of change, there is a disjunction in ranges, and I have argued that there are sociohistorical reasons for considering a particular directionality of SCE as more plausible than the alternatives. The SCE is as follows: (a) earlier division along the lines of the old Tista course, with (b) subsequent reintegration between communities on either side after the river shifted course (the sociolinguistic reintegration also aided by the socio-political integration brought into effect by the colonial powers at about the same time). This particular directionality of SCEs is more plausible than the alternative scenarios given what we know of the social history of the area. This directionality of Speech Community Events entails a particular chronological relation between the linguistic Propagation Events: *PEs associated with the old river course preceded PEs associated with the reorganisation into districts*. The changes that preceded the shift in river course in 1787 AD must also have occurred subsequent to the division of the proto-Kamta SC in 1550 AD (following the expansion of the Koch kingdom). This period of time, delimited for us by expansion at one end, and earthquake at the other, is defined in this study as the 'middle KRNB' stage of linguistic history. From this point onwards it becomes historically appropriate to talk of Kamta/Rajbanshi/Northern Deshi Bangla, rather than just 'Kamta' because it is during this period of 1550-1787AD that the term

Rajbanshi is first attested in historical documents, and it is during this period (under the Muslim rulers) that the term Bengal is increasingly used to refer to the regions earlier termed Gauda, Banga, and so on.

7.4.2. The westwards migration of proto-Kamta speakers

The sociohistorical arguments above suggest that speakers of the proto-Kamta language migrated westwards—across the Tista-Karatoya—in conjunction with the expansion of the Koch kingdom. The communities of emigrants took with them the innovative p-Kamta features, but having distanced themselves from the central KRNB SC they did not participate in the propagation of common innovations with the central SC during the period 1550-1787 AD. It was during this period that changes such as the palatalisation and labialisation of stops ([PI 6.] and [PI 7.]) plausibly occurred.

While several changes have been shown above to line up with the eastern bank of the old course of Tista, the dialectological data collected for this study provide less data on changes that might line up along the western side of the river. The comparative reconstruction has uncovered four possible candidates for "west bank" changes. They are:

[PI 18.] *ɛnd̪urɔ > /nid̪ur/ 'rat' {KS, RL, MH, TH}. Supportive, not diagnostic.
[PI 36.]*ɔw > /u/ {KS, RL, MH, TH}. Supportive, not diagnostic.
[PI 25.]*o > /ɔ/ / _ C a {KS, RL, MH, TH}. Diagnostic.
[MI 38.] *-rɔkɔm > *-rɔŋ 'like, similar to' {KS, RL, MH, TH (Hindus, not Muslims)}. Diagnostic.

Dialectological data were collected for the first and second, but not the third and fourth of these changes. The latter changes are sequenced similarly to the first two on the basis of economy of reconstruction, but this sequencing may need to be revised if and when the relevant dialectological data become available.

The dialectological data for [PI 18.] are represented in Figure 7-18. The solid shading once again indicates the presence of the innovation in the wordlist data collected at RL, KS and MH during the first stage of fieldwork.

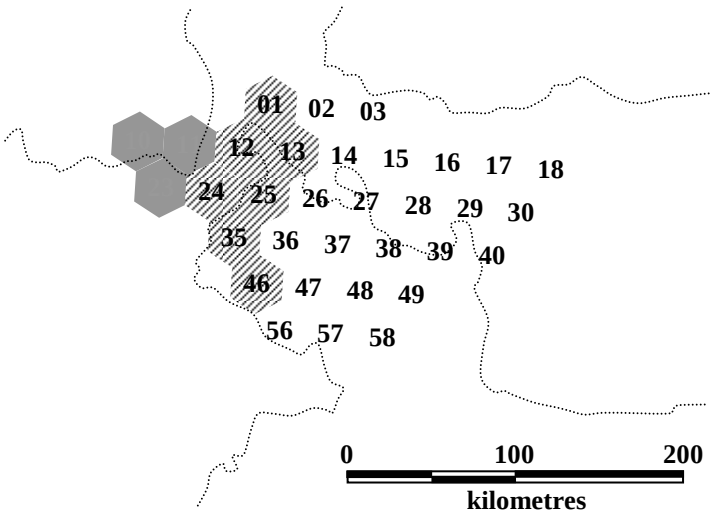


Figure 7-18. Dialect geography of *ɛn̪durɔ > /ni̪dur/ ‘rat’ [26]

The correspondence between the range of [PI 18.] and the old course of Tista is suggestive, even if not quite as exact as was seen above for the central KRNB changes. It is possible that [PI 18.] may have been present at sites 36 and 56 before the reintegration with central KRNB but subsequently lost due to borrowing of /ɛn̪dur/ ‘rat’.

The second possible proto-western KRNB change for which data was collected is [PI 36.], demonstrated by the divergence in primary agreement ending for first person singular subject. Generally, east of old Tista’s course the ending is /-oˇ;-o/, while west of the old course the ending is generally /-uˇ;-u/. A more precise description of the dialectological range of the two variants is given in Figure 7-19.

[26] See item 32 in Appendix E.

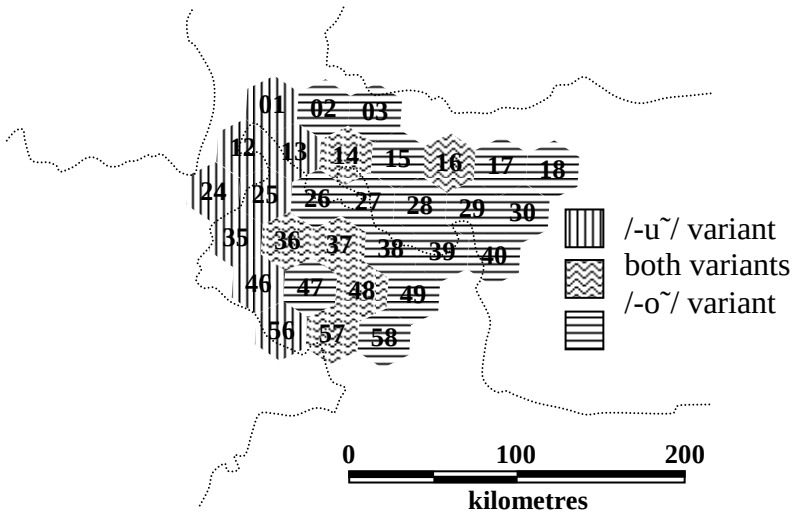


Figure 7-19. Dialect geography of /uˇ/ vs. /oˇ/ '1SG' in AGR:I[27]

This difference in personal endings is explained in 6.4.1.1 as the result of different reflexes of the inherited phonological sequence *-ɔwˇ. East of old Tista, the reflex is /-oˇ/; west of old Tista the reflex is /-uˇ/. The irregularity in Figure 7-19 on the eastern side of Tista (with instances of /-u/ at sites 14, 16, 37,48 and 57) could be the result of *analogical extension* of /-u/ '1.SG' from the past tense system (AGR.IIa) to the primary system of endings (compare the agreement systems of TH and RP in 6.3.4 and 6.3.6). The irregularity on the western side of Tista (with /-o/ collected at sites 26 and 36) could be *borrowing* as a result of exposure to the Tista-east norms after the shift in river course and the SC reintegration (similar to [PI 18.] above).

Together, these two changes ([PI 18.] and [PI 36.]) provide suggestive, if not conclusive evidence for a Propagation Network on the western bank of old Tista during the Middle KRNB period. Dialectological data for [PI 25.] and [MI 38.] may render the hypothesis more robust. At the present time, the reconstruction remains in some doubt and thus proto-Western KRNB is prefixed with a question mark in the tree diagrams of KRNB linguistic history: '?p-wKRNB' (see Figure 7-5).

More localised innovations west of the old river course are not hard to find, and will be discussed in section 7.5.2. A chronology for these more localised changes earlier than 1787 AD cannot be proven at this stage.

[27] See items 83 and 65 in Appendix E.

7.4.3. The formation of an eastern KRNB speech community

The north-eastern-most extent of the central KRNB changes is between sites 17 & 30 (Gosaigaon & Bogribari) and site 18 (near Kokrajhar) in the figures above. *The boundary is the same for PEs dated as Middle KRNB changes, as for PEs dated as Modern KRNB changes* (cf. section 7.5). That is, the KRNB 'eastern corrider of change'—separating central and eastern SCs—seems to have been stable since 1550 AD between Kokrajhar and Gosaigaon or Bogribari. This dialectological boundary is supported by the large wordlist data collected at BN (just east of site 18) and BH (near site 16). The sociohistorical conditioning of this sociohistorical division is not clear (cf. section 7.5.4).

7.4.4. Partial reintegration between KRNB and other NIA SCs

There are several innovations that are plausibly assigned to the middle KRNB period, and which are shared further afield than just KRNB:

[PI 9.]*C[+breathy voice, +continuant] > [+modal voice] / V_ {SH, RP, BH, BN, Oriya, Asamiya, Bangla} ([tentatively] after C16th, after rhoticisation). Diagnostic.

[PI 10.]Loss of aspiration in all inter-vocalic consonants {RP, BH, ?Bangla, ?Oriya}. Diagnostic.

[PI 12.]*ɳ , *ɭ > /n, l/ {KRNB, Bangla, Asamiya, Maithili, Hindi, etc.} (15th century or later). Diagnostic value unknown.

[PI 26.]*i, *u > /e/, /o/ / #(C)_C-V[- H] (verb root) {RP, BH, Bangla}. Diagnostic.

[PI 38.]*ɔ lost word finally {KRNB, Bangla, Asamiya, Hindi, Bhojpuri etc.} (chronology uncertain)

The loss of final *ɔ (PI 38.) occurs in all KRNB lects, as well as in Bangla, Asamiya, Hindi, Magahi, Nepali, besides many other NIA lects. Final *ɔ is maintained in Oriya and a small number of other NIA lects (cf. Masica 1991: 196). Somewhat similarly, the dental and postalveolar nasals and laterals have undergone merger in a number of NIA lects, notably Bangla, Asamiya, Hindi, and the Bihari lects. Oriya is exempt

from this change, as are the western NIA lects (e.g. Gujarati, Punjabi, etc.). There is a considerable overlap between the ranges of propagation of these changes, at least in eastern and midlands NIA. It is not out of the question that these changes were propagated *at the same time,* and through the same networks of speaker interaction. In this respect, we might consider the early 16th century expansion of the Mughal Empire as a possible cause for increased interaction between the Indo-Aryan midlands and eastern regions. J.N. Sarkar writes:

> The period of Mughal imperial rule over Bengal witnessed the working of certain new forces which have completely transformed Bengali life and thought and whose influence is still operating in the province. In one word, during the first century of Mughal rule (1575-1675 AD), the outer world came to Bengal and Bengal went out of herself to the outer world, and the economic, social and cultural changes that grew out of this mingling of peoples mark a most important and distinct stage in the evolution of modern Bengal. Indeed, there has been nothing in our province's past history at all comparable to it except the modernisation which we owe to the British influence. (J.N. Sarkar 1943: 216)

The hypothesis of a sociohistorical connection between the Mughal expansion and the propagation of [PI 12.] and [PI 38.] can only be properly verified in the context of a much broader reconstruction of NIA linguistic history.

The next change to be considered is the change from murmured to modal voicing in sonorants ([PI 9.], cf. 4.3.4). This change occurred in Oriya, Asamiya and Bangla, though not in the neighbouring Bihari lects. Within KRNB, the range of the innovation is given by isogloss E in Figure 7-6 above. The boundary of the isogloss runs through the middle of KRNB's western corridor of change, which makes assigning chronology on sociohistorical grounds difficult. Textual evidence from neighbouring standardised lects suggests that this change occurred during the middle KRNB period reconstructed by this study. The changes [PI 10.] (general loss of intervocalic aspiration) and [PI 26.] (regressive lowering in verb roots) have been reconstructed for the same period, based on the alignment of their range with the old course of Tista. Both [PI 10.] and [PI 26.] are shared by c.KRNB and Bangla, and the former of the two (deaspiration) may also be common with Oriya (cf. P. C. Majumdar 1970: xxxiii). We turn now to considering the sociohistorical phenomena attested for

the middle KRNB period which might have facilitated the propagation of these changes between KRNB and Bangla in the case of [PI 10.] and [PI 26.], and further up the Brahmaputra valley to Asamiya in the case of [PI 9.].

As described in 7.3.1, the 16th century saw the rapid expansion of the Kamta kingdom under Nara Narayan's reign through the initiatives of General Sukladhvaj. However, before the close of the same century, the kingdom had begun to shrink in size, and a rift within the ruling family of Kamta kingdom saw the kingdom divided along the Sankosh river (Gait 1905). Wars between the sister kingdoms led to Koch-Kamta's dependence on the Mughal armies coming from Bengal to defeat the rebel eastern Koch kingdom. A Mughal presence under the administration of Bengal was established in the region geographically between the Koch and Ahom kingdoms (Bhattacharya 1929, cited in Whyte 2002: 28). A temporary weakening of the Mughal kingdom in the mid-17th century led to joint efforts by the Koches and Ahoms to expel the Mughal presence, and the Koch armies campaigned "possibly as far south as Dhaka" (Whyte 2002: 28). The Mughal powers responded with a massive campaign under Mir Jumla, who marched his armies north from Dhaka and established fleeting victories over the Koch and Assam kingdoms, before disease and popular revolts forced the invaders' withdrawal. The geographical outline of these large scale movements of armed forces in the mid 17th century is shown in Figure 7-20, reproduced from Whyte (2002: 459).

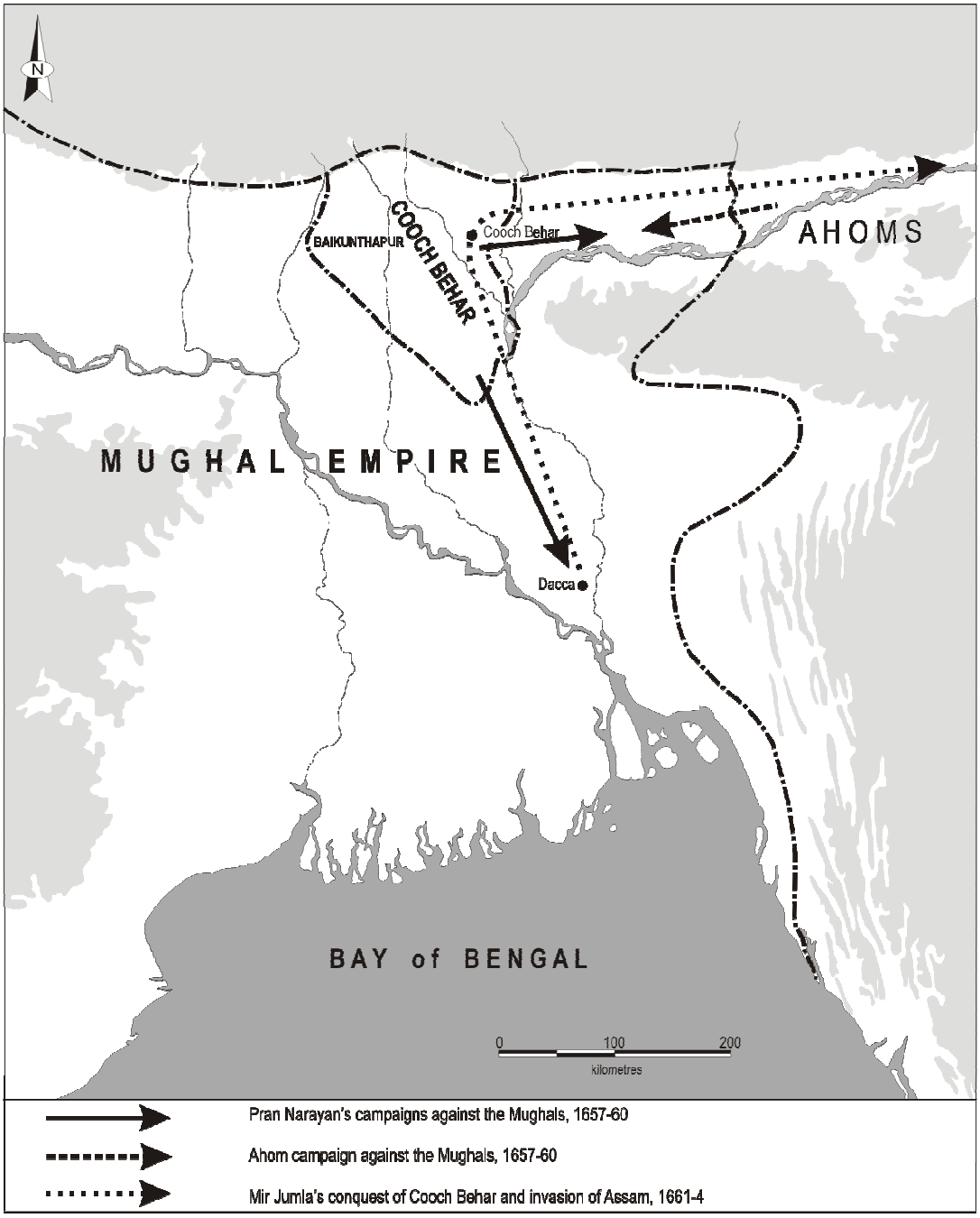


Figure 7-20. Pran Narayan's, and Mir Jumla's campaigns c. 1660

Whyte goes on to say that as a result of the Mughal invasions in the late 17th century "disbanded Mughal soldiers had occupied lands inside the remainder of Cooch Behar" (2002: 31, citing D. Majumdar 1977). There is no doubt that this century was a tumultuous time for the inhabitants of the Koch Behar kingdom, and also that it threw them into contact with speakers from south Bengal to an extent that had not happened in the preceding centuries. I propose therefore that it was during the 17th century that interaction with speakers from south Bengal led to the propagation of

changes [PI 9.] (murmured > modal voicing), [PI 10.] (loss of medial aspiration), and [PI 26.] (regressive lowering) between the speakers of c.KRNB and south Bangla lects.

This concludes the sociohistorical reconstruction of linguistic history for the middle KRNB period. The reconstruction to this point has been presented by way of the adjusted tree diagram in Figure 7-5 above.

7.5. The modern KRNB period: local innovations, and the influence of standard languages over the last 220 years

The basic trend during the middle KRNB period (1550-1787 AD) was that local and wide-scope innovations were propagated somewhat concurrently. The same trend has continued into the modern period (after 1787 AD) with the added effects of diglossia.

7.5.1. Diglossia during the Modern KRNB period

Diglossia is defined by Ferguson as:

> *a relatively stable language situation in which, in addition to the primary dialects of the language (which may include a standard or regional standards), there is a very divergent, highly codified (often grammatically more complex) superposed variety, the vehicle of a large and respected body of written literature, either of an ealier period or in another speech community, which is learned largely by formal education and is used for most written and formal spoken purposes but is not used by any sector of the community for ordinary conversation.* (Ferguson 2000: 75).

The codification of NIA languages such as Bangla and Hindi, and their promulgation as superposed varieties, is usually attributed to the British period (Chatterji 1926: 134; Kakati 1962: 16-17; Masica 1991: 29), though naturally these processes had their roots in earlier times. The key events which led to situations of diglossia were the establishment of Fort William College at Calcutta in 1800 AD and the launch of several printing presses in Calcutta during the first decade of that century. Chatterji writes regarding Standard Bangla that "the advent of Western learning brought in a sudden demand for a prose style" (1926: 134). A standard variety of Bangla began to be used for purposes of education, administration, and elite correspondence across the province of Bengal, including much of the KRNB area as well as today's Assam. The

British colonisation had a similarly significant impact on the development of Modern Standard Hindi (MSH), as Shapiro writes:

> To a great extent the emergence of MSH can be seen as a phenomenon that is thoroughly entwined with the sweeping political, social and communal changes that took place in North India between the establishment of the British Rāj in 1858 in the wake of the Great Rebellion of 1857-8 and the granting in 1947 of independence to India and Pakistan. The roots of these changes, of course, go back earlier. (Shapiro 2003: 255)

In the case of Asamiya, a standard written variety also began to be promulgated during the 19th century through the printing press established by the American Baptist missionaries at Sibsagar. However, Goswami and Tamuli (2003: 398) attribute the codification of written Asamiya to the earlier period of the *Buranjis* (17th to 19th centuries).

Therefore, with the possible exception of Asamiya, it seems justified to date as post 1800 AD those changes which are caused by diglossia. That is, they seem to have occurred during the Modern KRNB period. The changes which fit into this category are shown in Table 7-3 and include (i) morphological loans from the superposed variety in diglossia, and (ii) changes involving structural convergence (phonological or morphological) with this variety.

Innovations	Superposed variety	KS	RL	MH	TH	SH	RP	BH	BN
PI 29. MI 10.	Hindi								
PI 19. PI 34.	Hindi								
MI 8.	Hindi								
MI 50.	Hindi								
PI 28.	SCB								
MI 9.	SCB								
MI 54. MI 55. MI 58.	SCB								
MI 11. MI 12. MI 35. MI 72. MI 25. MI 28. MI 30. PI 11.	SCA								
MI 4.									

Table 7-3. Tableau showing changes resulting from diglossia

Across the KRNB area the superposed variety differs between Hindi (MSH), SCB and SCA. The different diglossias are regionally mutually exclusive: lects KS, RL and MH are used in diglossia with Hindi; lects TH, SH, RP and BH are used in diglossia with SCB; and the lect BN is used in diglossia with SCA. The degree of influence which the superposed variety has exercised on each of these lects is not the same. BN is the lect most thoroughly influenced by a superposed variety (SCA), followed by KS and RL which are influenced by Hindi, and TH which is influenced by SCB.

Structural similarities resulting from diglossia are not diagnostic of PEs (cf. 3.4.1.2). They indicate the influence of a superposed lect upon the vernacular, not the propagation of a variant between the vernaculars of interacting speakers. Thus, the similarities shared by (for example) KS, RL and MH as the result of diglossia with Hindi do not make them a phylogenetic subgroup, because subgroups are defined by PEs (cf. 3.4.1.2). Accordingly, in the depiction of linguistic history, relations of diglossia are marked differently to phylogenetic relations. The latter are marked with *solid* horizontal double lines, as has been seen in Figures 7-4 and 7-5 above. Relations of diglossia are marked instead by *broken* double horizontal lines in Figure 7-21. The broken *single* horizontal arrows connect KRNB lects with their respective superposed varieties. Thus, the meaning of horizontal arrows is distinct from the meaning of vertical and diagonal arrows—the latter indicating inheritance (cf. 3.4.4). Dialectological data were not collected for all the changes shown in Figure 7-21, and the sociohistorical sequencing for those changes without a clearly described dialectology cannot be conclusively established. Such changes are prefixed with a question mark. Nonetheless, they are included in the tree diagram with the same sequencing as other innovations which share the same distribution among the 8 lects used for reconstruction in chapters 4-6. The relations of sequence are hypothetical (given the missing dialectological data) and based on the principle of economy of reconstruction. Accordingly they may need to be revised if and when the relevant dialectological data become available.

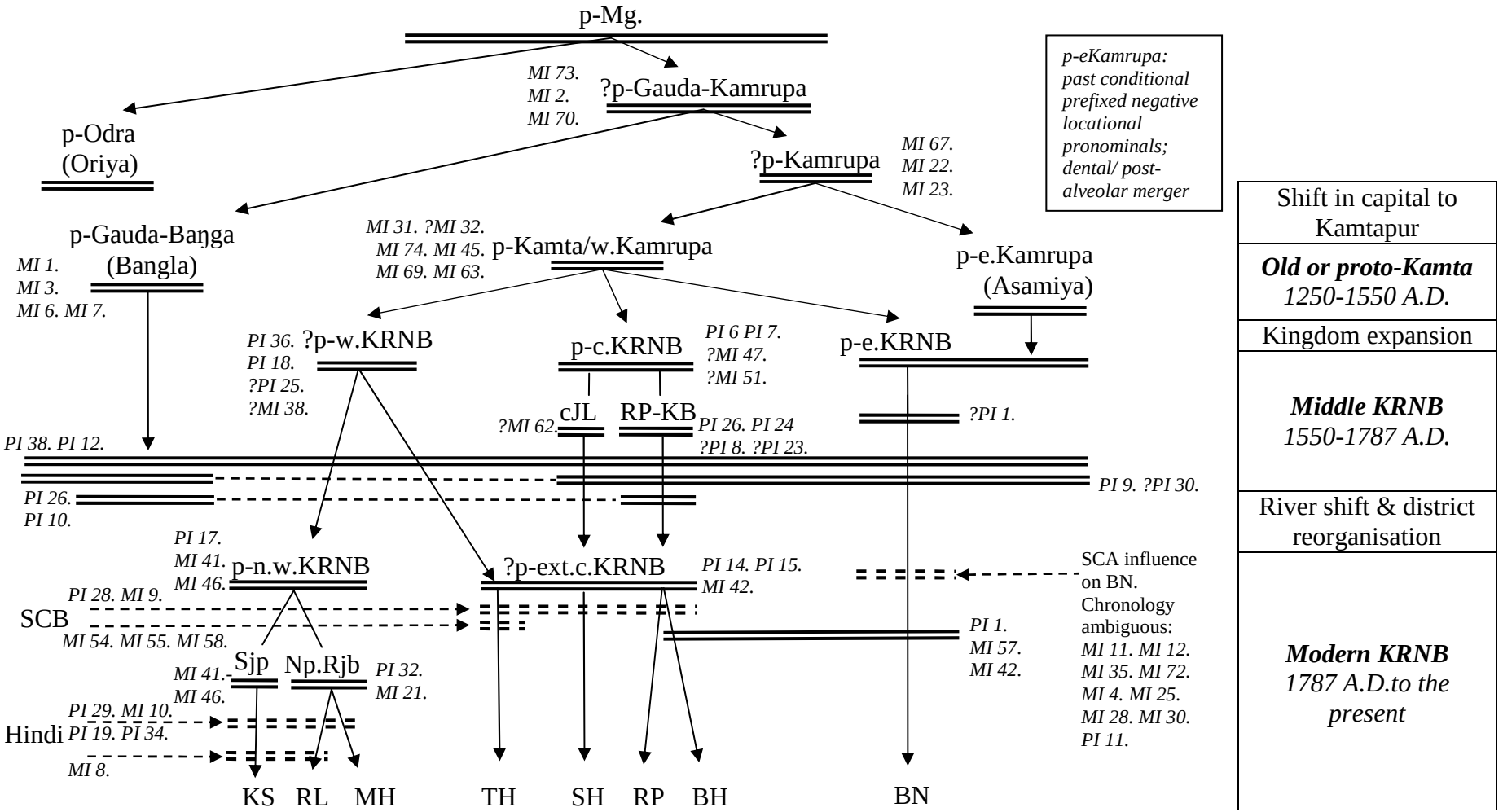


Figure 7-21. The linguistic history of KRNB from proto-Magadhan, through proto-Kamta, middle and modern KRNB, to the present

The historical relations depicted in the lowest portion of Figure 7-21 are discussed below.

7.5.2. North-west KRNB

The lects classed as 'north-west KRNB' are KS, RL and MH. These lects represent the 'Surjapuri' lect of Kishanganj district and the 'Rajbanshi' lect spoken in Morang and Jhapa districts of Nepal. KS, RL and MH share certain innovations in common which define north-west KRNB as a Propagation Network and subgroup (section 7.5.2.1). These three lects are also similarly characterised by diglossia with Hindi as the superposed variety (section 7.5.2.2).

7.5.2.1. The north-west KRNB propagation network

There are three PEs identified in this study that diagnose a north-west KRNB PN. They are:

[PI 17.] Homorganic cluster of N C [+asp, +vc] > N[+asp] {irregularly in KS, RL, MH, TH}. Supportive, not diagnostic.

[MI 41.] *ɛwla > /al^{ɦ}a/ 'now' {KS, RL, MH}. Diagnostic.

[MI 46.] *-ʈ^{h}ikna > /-ʈ^{h}ina/ 'place' {MH, RL, KS}. (after [PI 20.] and [PI 30.]-[PI 33.]). Diagnostic.

Detailed dialectological data were not collected as part of this study across the whole of the north-west KRNB area.[28] However, the eastern limit of [PI 17.] has been depicted in Figure 7-12 and shown in 7.4.1.2 to be one of three changes whose limits of westward-propagation correspond with the administrative boundaries established by the British. Other changes with a similar range are: *n > /l/ word-initially in *nɔḍi 'river' (Figure 7-14); and *ʈa 'CLF' > [ɖa] after a sonorant consonant (Figure 7-16). The first of these two changes seems to be an irregular phonological change, given that in the phonological reconstruction of Chapter 4 there are only two etyma (*nɔḍi 'river', id. #155, and *nab^{ɦ}i 'navel', id. #349) which have #n>l across all three of these lects. The second is a morphologically-conditioned phonological change.

[28] This limitation in the data collection was due largely to considerations of safety given the ongoing Maoist insurgency in Nepal.

Despite a lack of dialectological data for [MI 41.] and [MI 46.], these changes are sequenced similarly to [PI 17.] on the basis of economy of reconstruction. However, this sequencing may need to be revised if and when the relevant dialectological data become available.

[PI 17.] has already been reconstructed above as sociohistorically connected with the district boundaries between Purnia (Purneah), Dinajpur (Dinagepour) and Rangpur (Rungpour) established during the British period. Therefore, the p-n.w.KRNB Propagation Network is assigned to the Modern KRNB period (post-1787 AD).

Two more restricted PNs within n.w.KRNB are diagnosed by distinct sets of changes. The RL and MH lects are diagnosed as a subgroup by changes [PI 32.] and [MI 21.]. The KS lect is diagnosed as distinct from RL and MH by changes [MI 41.]-[MI 46.]. The RL-MH PN is labelled 'Np.Rjb' (Nepali Rajbanshi), and the KS PN is labelled 'Sjp' (Surjapuri) in Figure 7-21 above. The relative chronology of these PNs with respect to proto-north-western KRNB has not been established so far. Therefore, the diagonal lines connecting p-n.w.KRNB with Np.Rjb and Sjp in Figure 7-21 are given without arrowheads—which indicates that the sequencing is ambiguous. There are three alternative possibilities: (i) the Np.Rjb and Sjp PNs may have emerged as distinct networks after the p-western KRNB stage, but were subsequently reintegrated into the n.w.KRNB PN; or (ii) the n.w.KRNB PN may have diverged directly from the p-western KRNB stage, and was then subsequently divided into the Surjapuri and Nepal Rajbanshi PNs; or lastly (iii) all three PNs (n.w.KRNB, Np.Rjb, Sjp) may have co-existed within a complex north-west KRNB speech community during the Modern KRNB period. This historical problem is unsolved at present.

7.5.2.2. The influence of Hindi on the north-west KRNB speech community

The influence of Hindi on this subgroup of lects is diagnosed by changes: [PI 29.], [MI 10.], [PI 19.], [PI 34.]. RL and KS are slightly more affected by diglossia with Hindi than MH, as shown by [MI 8.] (cf. section 7.5.1). The impact of diglossia on these lects is largely phonological, with some changes also in the nominal case marking. The verbal morphology has been unaffected by the diglossia.

7.5.3. Extended-central KRNB

The lects classed as 'extended central KRNB' are TH, SH, RP and BH. These lects represent the Kamta, Rajbanshi and Northern Deshi Bangla lects of today's West Bengal (excluding north Dinajpur) and Bangladesh. These lects have undergone PEs which define them as a Propagation Network and subgroup (section 7.5.3.1). They are also characterised by diglossia with SCB as the superposed variety (section 7.5.3.2).

7.5.3.1. The extended-central KRNB propagation network

This PN is not very robustly supported by PEs, hence it is prefixed by '?' in Figure 7-21. The innovations relevant to diagnosing this PN are:

[PI 14.] *l > /n/ / #_ {RP, SH, BH, and TH Hindus}. Supportive, not diagnostic.

[PI 15.] *r > Ø / #_ {RP, variably in SH, TH, and among TH Hindus}. Diagnostic.

[MI 42.] *-bɛ- > -Ø- in ANP and REL temporal pronominals {TH, SH, RP, BH, BN}. Diagnostic.

The inclusion of BN in [MI 42.] is slightly problematic because otherwise BN does not show any indication of being within the extended central KRNB PN. Rather, BN's inclusion in [MI 42.] can be explained by a distinct propagation network between BH and BN which is diagnosed on other grounds, see 7.5.4.1. The dialectological ranges of [PI 14.] and [PI 15.] are given above in Figures 7-13 and 7-15 respectively. These ranges have been assigned to the Modern KRNB period (after the river shift and district organisation) in section 7.4.1.2.

7.5.3.2. The influence of SCB on the extended central KRNB speech community

The lects within the extended central KRNB subgroup share a similar linguistic ecology, characterised by diglossia with SCB. The innovations which have been diagnosed as resulting from diglossia are [PI 28.] and [MI 9.] across the extended central KRNB speech community, and three more changes just in TH—[MI 54.], [MI 55.] and [MI 58.]. Of the eight lects included in the reconstruction in Chapters 4-6, TH is the lect most affected by contact relations with SCB during the Modern KRNB

period. The effects of diglossia have been most noticable in the TH verbal morphology (cf. section 6.2).

Concerning the two changes that reflect broader diglossia in the area, the possibility has been mentioned in 5.3.9 that [MI 9.] may constitute an earlier retention. On balance, however, borrowing from SCB of this Ablative marker is perhaps more plausible. Concerning [PI 28.], Chatterji also supports a recent chronology and contact-related explanation for the present day range of this innovation (1926: 142).

7.5.4. Eastern KRNB

Eastern KRNB has only one representative in the reconstruction in chapters 4-6: BN. There are many innovations which separate BN from the other KRNB lects; some are unique to BN (section 7.5.4.1), but most constitute convergence with SCA norms (section 7.5.4.2). The boundary between central and eastern KRNB is between Gosaigaon and Bogribari (on the central side of the boundary) and Kokrajhar (on the eastern side of the boundary). This boundary has been stable throughout the middle and modern KRNB periods. As a result, the eastern KRNB changes cannot be disambiguated into different periods in history. Thus, the chronology of changes in BN's linguistic history after proto-Kamta remains unknown.

7.5.4.1. The eastern KRNB propagation network

In the reconstruction of chapters 4-6, only one change that is considered diagnostic of a Propagation Event centres on BN:

[PI 1.] Devoicing of the obstruent element (not the aspiration) of initial voiced aspirates {regular in BN, variable in BH}. Diagnostic.

This change is well established in BN, and sporadic in BH. It is likely that this change was innovated in BN some time ago, but is now being propagated further afield to partially include BH. Beyond this statement, nothing else has yet been gleaned of its chronological sequencing.

There are two other changes which also show evidence of propagation between BH (or possibly its nearest relative RP) and BN:

[MI 42.] *-bɛ- > -Ø- in ANP and REL temporal pronominals {TH, SH, RP, BH, BN}. Diagnostic.

[MI 57.] VERB-INF + present-perfective of *lag- ‘attach’ > ‘present continuous’ {RP, BH, BN}. Diagnostic.

These changes reflect a recent increase of interaction between speakers of RP, BH and BN lects. Sociohistorically, this increased interaction and the resultant PEs are plausibly due to the substantial migration of people from northern Rangpur to the Bongaigaon area of western Assam during the 20th century. Many of these migrants would have been speakers of a lect very closely related to RP and BH.

7.5.4.2. The influence of SCA on the eastern KRNB speech community

Asamiya lects have undergone major changes in their phonology, such as the merger of inherited dental and postalveolar stops and the fricativisation of inherited affricates. Eastern KRNB (BN) has undergone these same changes. Furthermore, eastern KRNB has undergone major convergence with Asamiya norms in its nominal and verbal morphology (cf. 6.4.3). The relevant changes formulated in chapters 4-6 for BN are:

[PI 11.] Apical series > alveolar articulation {BN and Asamiya} (during or before C15 in Asamiya, C20 in BN). Diagnostic of contact relations with SCA through diglossia.

[MI 4.] > /-[ɔ]r / ‘GEN’ {BN, from Asamiya}. Diagnostic of contact relations with Asamiya.

[MI 11.] > /pɔra/ ‘ABL’ {BN, SCA}. Diagnostic of contact relations with Asamiya.

[MI 12.] > /kɔi/ ‘CMP’ {BN, SCA}. Diagnostic of contact relations with Asamiya.

[MI 25.] /mɔj, tɔj/ ‘I, you’ {BN}. Diagnostic of contact relations with Asamiya.

[MI 28.] > /ami/ ‘we’ {BN} Supportive, not diagnostic, of contact relations with Asamiya.

[MI 30.] > /apuni/ ‘2.H:NOM’, /apona-/ ‘2.H:OBL’ {BN} Supportive, not diagnostic, of contact relations with Asamiya.

[MI 35.] > / ba-/ ‘INDF’ in pronouns {BN, from Asamiya}. Diagnostic of contact relations with Asamiya.

[MI 72.]> /-a/ ‘2.High’ {BN}. (Chronology uncertain). Diagnostic of contact relations with Asamiya.

With the exception of [PI 11.], whose recent occurrence in BN has been discussed in 4.3.6, there seem to be no criteria (linguistic, textual or sociohistorical) for sequencing the rest of these changes. The linguistic boundary between Gosaigaon-Bogribari and Kokrajhar does not coincide with a clear geographical or social boundary. Historically, the border between Assam and the Koch kingdom, and then later between Assam and the Mughal empire, moved back and forth between the Bar Nadi (much further east than Kokrajhar) and the river Sankosh (further west from Gosaigaon). Neither of these historical social divisions accounts for the location of the divide between central and eastern KRNB. The question remains: why has SCA exercised such a high degree of influence over the KRNB lect of Bongaigaon and Kokrajhar, but not over the lect spoken in the adjacent area of Dhubri, Gosaigaon, and Bogribari (all still within the State of Assam)? The sociohistorical conditioning of this consistent line of interrupted propagation between central and eastern KRNB is presently unknown, and left for further research.

7.6. Conclusion

This chapter has outlined a coherent account of the linguistic history of KRNB based on rigorous sociohistorical reconstruction of the sequencing of linguistic changes. The sociohistorical criteria have supplemented the linguistic and textual criteria for sequencing that were applied in earlier chapters. The final results of the historical reconstruction has been depicted by way of an adjusted tree diagram in Figure 7-21. By way of final conclusion, the next chapter surveys the methodological, social and historical linguistic implications of the study as a whole.