9.2 Assamese Language Details

Introduction

This document provides general information about the Assamese language and some conventions of its usage in Assam. The information presented in this document is intended to assist in understanding the nature and problems of Assamese implementation in current and future products. It contains the generic description of Assamese.

Assam

Assam is a land of myths and mystery. “The land of red rivers and blue hills”, as it is described, is located in the northeastern part of the country and has an area of 30,285 square miles (78,438 square kilometers). It is bounded on the northern side by the kingdom of Bhutan and the state of Arunachal Pradesh; the east by the states of Nagaland and Manipur; to the south lies Mizoram and Tripura; and to the west by the state of Meghalaya, West Bengal and the republic of Bangladesh.

The Brahmaputra River Valley is the dominant physical feature of Assam. The river enters Assam near Sadiya in the extreme northeast and runs westward across the length of Assam for nearly 450 miles before turning south to enter the plains of Bangladesh. The river valley around 50 miles wide, is studded with numerous low, isolated hills and ridges that abruptly rise from the plain. The valley, surrounded on all sides, except the west, by mountains is intersected by many streams and rivulets that flow from the neighbouring hills and empty into the Brahmaputra.

The average temperature is moderate, and is about 84 degrees F (29 degrees C) in the hottest month of August. The average valley temperature in January is 61 degree F (16 degree C). In this season, the climate of the valley is marked by heavy fog and a little rain.

Assam does not have the normal Indian hot, dry season. Some rain occurs from March onwards, but the real force of the monsoon winds is faced from June onwards. Rainfall in Assam ranks among the highest in the world; its annual rainfall varies from 70 inches in the west to 120 inches per year in the east. Largely concentrated during the months from June to September, it often results in widespread destructive floods. Much of the state is covered with dense tropical forests. Rich in wildlife, the common animals found in Assam include the elephants, tigers, leopards, and one horned rhinos.

The capital of Assam is Dispur in Guwahati.

Languages

Names of the Languages

Assamese is the principal language of Assam. Besides Assamese, other recognized Indian languages spoken in the State are Bengali and Hindi. The major indigenous languages other than Assamese are Bodo, Karbi, Mishing and Rabha.

Description of the Assamese language

Assamese has derived its phonetic character set and its behaviour from Sanskrit. It is written using the Assamese script. Assamese is written from left to right and top to bottom, in the same manner as English. A large number of ligatures are possible since potentially all the consonants can combine with one another. Vowels can either be independent or dependent upon a consonant or a consonant cluster.

History of the Assamese Language

Assamese is the easternmost New Indo-Aryan language spoken in the Assam valley districts ranging from Lakhimpur in the extreme east to Goalpara in the extreme west. Bengali is also spoken in the west. In addition many languages belonging to altogether different families (mainly Tibeto-Burman
and Khasi of the Mon Khmer family) are also spoken.

The history of the Assamese language may be broadly divided into three periods:

1) Early Assamese (14th to 16th century AD):
   This period may again be split into (a) Pre-Vaishnavite and (b) Vaishnative sub-periods.
   The earliest known Assamese writer is Hema Sarasvati who wrote a small poem "Prahra Charita". In the time of the king Indranarayana of Kamatapur, the son of Durlabhanarayana, the two poets Harihara Vipra and Kaviratna Sarasvati composed Asvamedha Parva and Jayadratha Vadha respectively. Another poet named Rudra Kandali translated 'Drona Parva' into Assamese. But the most well known poet of the Pre-Vaishnavite sub-period is Madhava Kandali, who rendered the entire Ramayana into Assamese verse under the patronage of Mahamanikya, a kachari king of Jayantapura.
   Sankara Deva, the great Vaishnavite reformer in Assam, born in 1449 AD composed religious songs and drama. In his compositions there is a large admixture of what is popularly known as Braja-Buli idioms.

2) Middle Assamese (17th to 19th Century AD):
   This is a period of the prose chronicles of the Ahom court. The Ahoms had brought with them an instinct for historical writings. In the Ahom court, historical chronicles were at first composed in their original Tibeto-Chinese language, but when the Ahom rulers adopted Assamese as the court language, historical chronicles began to be written in Assamese. From the beginning of the seventeenth century onwards, court chronicles were written in large numbers. These chronicles or buranjis, as they were called by the Ahoms, broke away from the style of the religious writers. The language is essentially modern except for slight alterations in grammar and spelling.

3) Modern Assamese:
   The modern Assamese period began with the publication of the Bible in Assamese prose by the American Baptist Missionaries in 1819 AD. The currently prevalent Standard Assamiya has its roots in the Sibsagar dialect of Eastern Assam. As mentioned in Bani Kanta Kakati's "Assamese: Its Formation and Development" (1941, Published by Sree Khagendra Narayan Dutta Baruah, LBS Publications, G.N. Bordoloi Road, Guwahati-1, Assam, India) - 'The Missionaries made Sibsagar in Eastern Assam the centre of their activities and used the dialect of Sibsagar for their literary purposes'. The American Baptist Missionaries were the first to use this dialect in translating the Bible in 1813 AD. These Missionaries established the first printing press in Sibsagar in 1836 AD and started using the local Asamiya dialect for writing purposes. In 1846 AD, they started a monthly periodical called Arunodaya, and in 1848 AD, N. Brown published the first book on Assamese Grammar. The Missionaries published the first Assamese-English Dictionary compiled by M. Bronson in 1867 AD. The Sibsagar Asamiya dialect came to be formally recognized as the Standard Assamiya dialect when it was made the official language of the state by the Britishers. It was introduced in the schools, courts and Government offices in 1872. This Standard was accepted by all other Assamiya dialects as the standard norm, and was used for all formal occasions in writing, in the classroom, in meetings, in the courts and offices and for inter-dialect communication also.

The word Assamese is an English one, built on the same principle as Cingalese, Canarese, etc. It is based on the English word Assam by which the tract consisting of the Brahmaputra valley is known. But the people themselves call their state Asam/ असम / and their language Asamiya/ असमिया /.
Population using the Assamese Language
According to the 1991 census the populations of the Assamese speakers is stated at, 1,29,38,088 persons.

Technical Characteristics
Assamese Alphabet Characteristics

The Assamese alphabet is almost identical with the Bengali alphabet.

Consonant letters

The first twenty-five consonant letters are called ‘sparsha barna’. These ‘sparsha barnas’ are again divided into five ‘barga’. Therefore these twenty-five letters are also called ‘barga barna’.

The letters ‘(taaloibbya sa) (mudhoinnya sa) (dantiya sa) (ha)’ are called ‘usma barna’.

The letters ‘(za) (ra) (la) (wa)’ are called ‘antastha barn’.

The letters ‘(dare ra) and (dhare ra)’ are phonetically similar to /ra/.

The letter ‘(antastha za)’ is articulated like “antastha ya” in the word medial and final position. To denote the “antastha ya” the letter ‘( antastha ya )’ is used in Assamese.

*(The words between the brackets indicate the equivalent Assamese pronunciation)*

Independent Vowel letters

There are eleven independent vowel letters in Assamese. These are

Vowels are of two types:

Short (harswa) ‘(a), (aa), (harswa i )

Dirgha ‘(dirgha ii ), (harswa u ), (dirgha uu )

(O), (oi), (ou)

The vowel letter ‘(ri)’ is the combination of /r/ and /i/
Dependent vowel signs (Matras)
There are equivalent matras for all the vowels. These matras can exist above, below, to the right or to the left of the consonant to which it is applied.

- आ ऋ (aakaar)
- ह र (hraswa ikaar)
- इ ड (dirgha ikaar)
- उ र (hraswa ukaar)
- ऊ ड (dirgha ukaar)
- ए ऋ (rikaar)
- ओ ऋ (ekaar)
- औ ऋ (okaar)
- ऋ ऊ (oukaar)

Halant
To write a consonant without the inherent vowel the halant sign is used below the base glyph. In Assamese this sign is called 'hasanta'.

Consonant Conjuncts
In Assamese, the combination of three consonants is possible without their intervening vowels. In Assamese there are about 122 conjunct letters. Examples are—

- अ (andha), अ (ancha), अ (anda), अ (antha), अ (ambha), अ (addha), अ (astha), अ (aska), क (kra), अ (angga), अ (ashta), अ (swa), अ (tma), अ (bhra), अ (aashpa), अ (aanma), क (akta), अ (pra), अ (stra), अ (andra), अ (ambhra)

Nukta
Does not exist.

Anuswar
Anuswar (ॐ) indicates a nasal consonant sound (velar). When an anuswara comes before a consonant belonging to any of the 5 bargas, it represents the nasal consonant belonging to that barga.

Chanda Bindu
Chanda Bindu (ॐ) denotes nasalization of the vowel that it is attached to.

Visarg
Visarg (ॐ) (bisarga in Assamese) comes after a vowel sound and represents a sound similar to /h/.

Avagraha
Does not exist.

Numerals
The Assamese script has its own numerals.
0 (suinya), 1 (ek), 2 (dui), 3 (tini), 4 (saari), 5 (paas), 6 (sai), 7 (saat), 8 (aath), 9 (nau), 10 (dah)

Punctuation Marks
Full stop द ति (·) (daari)
Comma क म (,) (kamaa)
Semi colon क ग (;) (semi colon)
Colon क ल (:) (colon)
Question mark प्र क च (?)(prasnabudhak sin)
Exclamatory sign भ ब ब ( !)(bhaababudhak sin)
Inverted commas उ र द (””) (urddha kamaa)
Hyphen ह इ (–) (hyphen)
Parenthesis च थ (sandrabandhani)
Braces ख ल त (kutil bandhani)
Brackets क र (bar bandhani)

Ancient signs
There are three obsolete letters in Assamese.
They are ग (rii), र (lii),
Character Set Consideration

Assamese Characteristics

Phonological features

(1) A unique feature of the Assamese language is a total absence of any retroflex sounds. Instead the language has a whole series of alveolar sounds, which include oral and nasal stops, fricatives, laterals, approximants, flaps and trills, unlike other Indo-Aryan and Dravidian languages.

(2) Another striking phonological feature of the Assamese language is the extensive use of velar nasal /ŋ/. In other New Indo Aryan languages this /ŋ/ is always attached to a homorganic sound like /ɡ/. In contrast it is always used singly in Assamese.

(3) The voiceless velar fricative /χ/ is a distinct characteristic of Assamese language which is not to be found in any language in the entire country. It is similar to the velar sound in German of Europe. It may be an Indo-European feature, which has been preserved by Asamiya. It is an important phoneme in the language. It is represented by the letters अ, औ, ए and ऐ.

Grammatical features

(1) The use of personal markers in regard to the use of various kinship terms in reference to the age and rank of both the speaker and listener is a unique feature of the Assamese language. For instance

In Assamese: tumar deutara (your father) Here, - ra is the personal dieticics or markers.

(2) The process of negation of verbs in Assamese is another feature which clearly demarcates it from the rest of the sister new Indo-Aryan languages and other Dravidian languages. In Assamese /n/ is attached to the verb followed by a vowel which is the exact copy of the vowel of the first syllable of the verb, as in

(i) / nalage/ ‘do not want’ (1st, 2nd, 3rd person)
(ii) / nilikhu/ ‘will not write’ (1st person)

The various negative markers in Assamese are /na/, /ni/, /nu/, /ne/ and /no/.

(3) The use of the plural suffixes is another feature of Assamese language. In Assamese, for instance, all the bound forms such as

/ hot/, /bur/, /bilak/, /mokha/, /zak/, /xatkol/ etc denote plurality and are suffixed to a noun or a pronoun.

(4) The extensive use of classifiers is another feature of the Assamese language. For almost everything or every shape the language uses a different classifiers. For example -

/ zon/, /zoni/, /goraki/, /tu/, /ta/, /ti/, /khan/ etc.

(5) The classifiers are also combined with all types of nouns and numerals occurring in the language resulting in the combinations of the following type of grammatical constructions.

ε + zon + manuh (numeral + classifier + noun)
manuh + ε + zon (noun + numeral + classifier)

Usage Frequencies
Input Sequence Validity

Fonts

Character Cell Size

Almost the same as Bengali except for the alphabets /ra/ and /wa/

Glyphs to be supported in Assamese Fonts

Keyboard

ISCII
Presentation and Storage Considerations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character Composition</th>
<th>Same as Bengali</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Data Entry</td>
<td>Same as Bengali</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Printing Displaying</td>
<td>Same as Bengali</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text Space Requirement</td>
<td>Same as Bengali</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assamese Composing</td>
<td>Same as Bengali</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Formats of Units

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Calendar</th>
<th>केलेंदার (kelendaar)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week</td>
<td>সপ্তা (saptā)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>তারিখ (taarikh)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>সাঁঝ (saumoi)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>সংখ্যা (sauingkhya)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Currency</td>
<td>টকা (tokaa)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Localization Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviated Language Name</th>
<th>Asamiya To be decided</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abbreviated Country Name</td>
<td>ভারত (bhaarot)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AM/PM Markers</td>
<td>পূর্বাহ (puraahna)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AM</td>
<td>পূর্ব (puh)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PM</td>
<td>অপরাহ (aparaahna)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eras</td>
<td>গুণ (zug)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Calendars

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Optional (in Asamiya)</th>
<th>সাকাব্দা (sakaabda)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gregorian (in Asamiya)</td>
<td>খ্রিস্টাব্দ (khristaabda)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Month Names (Asamiya)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>বছর (bahaag)</th>
<th>লা (zeth)</th>
<th>আহার (aahaar)</th>
<th>শাসন (saasen)</th>
<th>অধ্যাদ (bhaadadu)</th>
<th>আহিন (aahin)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>কাঠি (kaati)</td>
<td>আঘা (aaghun)</td>
<td>পু (puh)</td>
<td>মা (maag)</td>
<td>ফুগ (phaagun)</td>
<td>চৌ (sot)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Weekday Names

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sunday</th>
<th>দেব (deubaar)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monday</td>
<td>সোমবার (sumbaar)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>মঙ্গলবার (mangalbaar)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>বুধবার (budhbaar)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>ব্রহ্মপতিবার (brihaspatibaar)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>হুক্রবার (hukrabaar)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday</td>
<td>শনিবার (sonibaar)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TimeZone</td>
<td>IST (5:30)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Measuring System used

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>M etre</th>
<th>মিটার (mitaar)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kilometre</td>
<td>কিলোমিটার (kilomitaar)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The yard</td>
<td>গজ (gaz)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A measure of length</td>
<td>লোয়া (losaa)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yards square</td>
<td>কোথা (kothaa)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twenty lasas (of land)</td>
<td>পু (puraa)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 kathas of land</td>
<td>বিঘা (bigha)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four bighas of land</td>
<td>পুরা (puraa)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number Elements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Zero</th>
<th>পুরা (suinya)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One</td>
<td>এক (ek)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two</td>
<td>দুই (dui)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three</td>
<td>তিনি (tini)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four</td>
<td>চারি (saari)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five</td>
<td>পাঁচ (paas)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Six</td>
<td>ছয় (sai)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seven</td>
<td>সাত (saat)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eight</td>
<td>আট (aath)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nine</td>
<td>ন (nau)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Native International Currency Symbol

| Rs | টকা (tokaa) |

July, 2002
9.2.1 Typical Colloquial Sentences in Assamese

**GREETING**

- Hello
  
  নমস্কার
  namaskaara

- Good Morning
  
  সুপ্রভাত
  suprabhaata

- Good Night
  
  সুপ্রভাতিঃ
  s'ubharaatrii

- Good Bye
  
  বিদায়
  bidaay'a

- Thanks
  
  ধন্যবাদ
  dhany’baada

- How are you
  
  আপনি কেন আছেন?
  aapuni kene aache

- I am fine thank you
  
  আমি ভাল আছে , ধন্যবাদ
  mai bhaale aachUM’

- Sorry
  
  ক্ষমা করিও
  kSamaa kariba

**WEATHER**

- It is cold
  
  এতিয়া ঠাণ্ডা
  etiy’aa ThaaN Daa
It is cool outside
वाताँक ठहरा परिचे ।
बाहिरत ठाण्याचा परिचे ।
bāahirata ThaaN D aa pariche

It is hot
एतिह घर ।
एतिह घर ।
eti'aa garama

It is raining
कबूत द आँक ।
कबूत द आँक ।
baraSuna a di aache

GENERAL

What is your name?
तुम्हांचा नाम की ?
तुम्हांचा नाम की ?
tū maara naama ki

My name is Ranjan
तुम्हांचा नाम रणजन ।
तुम्हांचा नाम रणजन ।
mUr naama ran'jana

Where do you live?
तुम्हां घर थाका ?
तुम्हां घर थाका ?
tumī kata thaakaa

I live near Ghantaghar
मंगळाचा घर आहे ।
मंगळाचा घर आहे ।
mai ghanTaa gharar ocarata thaakUM'

How old are you?
तुम्हां किती वर्ष ?
तुम्हां किती वर्ष ?
tumi kata kumaana

That building is tall
तेथे एकेला ठोळ सुंदर ।
तेथे एकेला ठोळ सुंदर ।
sē aT TaalikaatU okha

She is beautiful
तात्त्वेक सुंदर ।
tāt'ēvek sūnder ।
taai dekhaata dhuniy'aa

I like Bengali sweets
माहेश सुंदरी सितारा भाला ।
māhēsh sūnderi sitārā bhala ।
mai bangali miThaai bhaala paaM'

I love birds
माहेश सुंदरी सितारा भाला ।
māhēsh sūnderi sitārā bhala ।
mai caraai cirikati bhaala paaM'

Where is Railway station?
केवल टिकेटो मळा का ?
kēval tiketo maḷa kā ?
rel STecanaTU kata

How far is the Bus terminal from here?
वाहे आस्थांत टिकेटबांग एका जुडू ?
vahe āsthānt tiketo bangāṇa juddū ?
bācha aasθānaTU i'y'aara paraa kimaana duurata

How long will it take to reach the Airport?
विमानवन्दन पाठवूक एका जुडू ?
vimaanvandana pāṭha rīk kimaana duurata ?
bimaanbandara paabalai kimaana samay'a laagiba

Is Mr. Raghunath there?
श्रीपुत्र मुख्तार आचेने ?
śrīputra mukhtaTā aachene ?
shriyuta rāguṇatha aachēne

Please tell him to call back as soon as he is free
अनुशंष करा कोरा कालविक डिहें याच माध्यम करा ।
anuśāṣ kara koṛa kālavik dhiṁe yaça mādhyama kara ।
anugraha kari teoM'ka aajari hUvaara lage lage phU na karibalai kaba

July, 2002
H ow much will it cost?
इयार दाम किमान निे।
iy’aa daama kimaana

E xcuse me
क्रमा करिब ।
krama kariba

F rom which Platform can I get the train for Chandigarh?
चांडीगढ़ तेलारा एनएफ स्टेस्शन प्लेटफॉर्म परा पाम ?
varshi mukhde jeevya relakhana konkhon platform pata paam?
candiigaratayu vaa relakhana kuUkhanaka pleTapharmara paraa paama

D oes this train stop at Aligarh?
ए ठेला शिखर रायत ?
ए रेलखन आलिगाट रवने ?
ei relakhana aaligara ata rabane

H ow many kids do you have?
आपणा लालच - देहाती क्रूड?
आपणा स्टडी - छोपाली केअडा ?
aapU naa laara chUvaa chU vaalii keiTaa

T his gift is wonderful
ए उपहार ही पति दुहाएँ ।
ए उपहार आति दुहाएँ ।
ei upahaaraTU ati dhuniy’aa

I t is really pretty
एडो मैल कलम हुदीया ।
एडो हंसाकळ पुतरीया ।
eiTU saM ‘caakaiy’e dhuniy’aa

F ood is delicious
खाणाट दुहुनु खुदाँ ।
खाणाट सुबाँ खुदाँ ।
khaady’bastu susbaadu

C ongratulations
अधिनन्दन
अधिनन्दन
abhinandana

You look lovely
तोमाफ देखिबले भाल लामीँत ।
tUmaaka dekhibalai bhaala laagiche

W ish you happy new year
नवरह सुल्त जनाली ।
नवराह ओलगा जनाली ।
navabarSara olaa janaalUm ’

I wish you all the happiness
चौरी सूची तेवरा ।
तुमी हुली होया
tumi sukhii hU vaa

C ongratulations on your marriage
शुभविहार अधिनन्दन बाड़िली
शुभविहार अधिनन्दन जाप्ली
s’ubhabibaahara abhinandana yaacilUm ’

K eep your eyes wide open before marriage and half- shut afterwards
बिबाह पूर्व तेलारा चक् रेलिया सार बिबाह सिद्ध आई आक बाढ़ीयाँ ।
बिबाह पूर्व तोमारा चक् मैसी राखिया आर बिबाह फिङ्ग आर दुध कर राखिया ।
Bibaahara puurbe tUmaara cuku meli raakhibaa aaru bibaahara pichata artha bandha kari raakhibaa

(Courtesy : Prof. Gautam Barua
D epartment of Computer Science & Engineering
I ndian Institute of Technology
Guwahati 781 001 (Assam)
Tel. 0361-690321-28
Cell N o. : 098640-25475
E-mail : gb@iitg.ernet.in)

July, 2002