Alternative Names: A'chik, Mande.

Classification: Sino-Tibetan, Tibeto-Burman, Bodo-Garo. Garo is very close to Bodo and Dimasa, spoken in Assam.

Overview. Garo is one of the many languages of northeastern India where seven 'sister states', almost cut off from the rest of the country and close to Myanmar, harbor many Tibeto-Burman speakers. All of these states, except Assam, are mountainous. Among them is Meghalaya ('abode of the clouds'), the home of the Garos, a tribal people, who were originally animistic and converted later to Christianity. Garo is a suffixing language and, in contrast to many Sino-Tibetan languages, is non-tonal.

Distribution. Garo is spoken in northeastern India, particularly in the Garo Hills of the state of Meghalaya, and across the border in Bangladesh. Smaller numbers of Garo speakers are found in the neighboring Indian states of Assam and Tripura. In Meghalaya, the Garos occupy the western part of the state while the Khasis, who speak an Austroasiatic language, inhabit its eastern regions.

Speakers. Around 1 million of which 880,000 live in India and 130,000 in Bangladesh.

Status. Garo has no official status. In India, elementary education in the Garo Hills is conducted in Garo, but in Bangladesh all education is given in Bengali. There, the influence of Bengali is pervasive, and potentially threatening to Garo. Even if Garo is written, the amount of printed material in it is quite small.

Varieties. All Garo dialects are mutually intelligible. The standard is the dialect of the northeastern area of the Garo Hills called A'we. Abeng is spoken in the western Garo Hills and in Bangladesh. Matchi, Chisak and Dual are prevalent in the central and southern areas of the district.

Oldest Documents
Garo wordlists were collected by British officials at the end of the 18th century and beginning of the 19th. The first grammars were published by American missionaries in 1874 and 1904.

Phonology
Vowels (5-6): Garo has six monophthongs but [i] and [ɯ] are in complementary distribution and they are not differentiated in writing, being both rendered as i. In syllables that end with a consonant other than a glottal stop (not forming part of a consonant cluster) it is pronounced [ɯ], otherwise it is pronounced [i]. Garo has two diphthongs: ai, au.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Front</th>
<th>Central</th>
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<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>i</td>
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<td>Mid</td>
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Consonants (20): are articulated at three main points, labial, alveolar and velar. In each of them are produced a set of voiceless and voiced stops + nasal. The voiceless stops have unaspirated and aspirated varieties which are in complementary distribution. The liquid [r] is a flap sound. Other places of articulation, producing a more limited number of sounds, are palatal and glottal.
**Stop**

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<tr>
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<th>Labial</th>
<th>Alveolar</th>
<th>Palatal</th>
<th>Velar</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Voiceless</td>
<td>p pʰ</td>
<td>t tʰ</td>
<td>k kʰ</td>
<td>ʔ</td>
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<tr>
<td>Voiced</td>
<td>b d</td>
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**Affricate**

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**Fricative**

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<th>Voiceless</th>
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<td>s dʒ</td>
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**Nasal**

|            | m n ŋ     |

**Liquid**

|            | l r       |

**Glide**

|            | w         |

* most consonants (but not all) are allowed at the beginning of a syllable but only a smaller set of consonants are allowed at the end of it. Permitted final consonants are the three voiceless stops (p, t, k), the three nasals (m, n, ŋ), l, and the glottal stop. Only m and n can appear in initial and final position.

* voiceless stops are aspirated in initial position, but unaspirated if at the end of a syllable.

* the glottal stop occurs only at the end of a syllable (but not at the end of a word), frequently in combination with a nasal or l.

* the velar nasal occurs only in a syllable final position.

* l and r are in complementary distribution: r occurs only at the beginning of a syllable and l only at the end of it.

**Tones:** Garo lacks tones, in contrast with many other Tibeto-Burman languages.

**Script and Orthography.** Garo uses a Roman script based on the A'we dialect spoken in the northeastern area of the Garo Hills. It was developed by American Baptist missionaries at the end of the 19th century. In Bangladesh, Garo is usually written with the Bengali script. The Roman script has 21 letters (phonetic values between brackets):

A a  B b  Ch ch  D d  E e  G g  H h  I i  J j  K k  L l
[a] [b] [tʃ] [d] [e] [g] [h] [i/ɯ] [dʒ] [k/kʰ] [l]

M m  N n  O o  P p  R r  S s  T t  U u  W w  ’ w
[m] [n] [o] [p/pʰ] [r] [s] [t/tʰ] [u] [w] [ʔ]

* the diphthong au is written ao.

* the nasal velar [ŋ] is written with the digraph ng.

**Morphology**

**Nominal.** Many nouns consist of only one monosyllabic morpheme, but some are bi- or tri-syllabic and also bi- or tri- morphemic. The majority of polysyllabic nouns are compounds. Some of the nouns that are part of a compound cannot be used alone. Classificatory morphemes precede the noun and specify its nature, for instance: the syllable do' is found in bird names, bi- in plant names, etc. Nouns may take a variety of suffixes to indicate case and number.

• **case:** nominative, accusative, dative, genitive, locative, instrumental. Case is indicated by suffix markers placed at the end of the noun phrase. Many postpositions may follow the case markers.

  - nominative is marked by the suffix -a only on monosyllabic pronouns. Nouns lack an overt nominative marker.
  - accusative is marked on objects by the suffix -ko.
  - dative is marked by the suffix -na.
  - genitive is marked by the suffix -ni placed after a noun or pronoun. It is the case that uses the greater variety of postpositions.
  - locative is marked by the suffix -o (temporal/spatial) or -chi (spatial only).
  - instrumental is marked by -chi (meaning "with" or "by means of") and -ming ("accompanying").

• **number:** plural is marked by suffixes (-rang, -dang, -drang) that precedes the case marker, but is not obligatory. Singular is marked by a classifier phrase with the suffix -sa that means 'one'.
• **numeral classifiers**: they are always used with numbers in order to specify the nature of the thing counted; people, animals, portions, groups, ideas, etc. -ge is a general classifier required when a more specific classifier is not available.

• **pronouns**: personal, demonstrative. Personal pronouns distinguish three persons and two numbers (1s, 2s, 3s; 1p, 2p, 3p). Besides, the 1st person plural has two varieties: exclusive and inclusive (of the speaker). Demonstratives can be used as adjectives or pronouns. There are two: i(a) (‘this’) and u(a) (‘that’). The final a is dropped when a case marker is added. As Garo has no articles, demonstratives may be used to indicate definiteness.

• **adjectives**: Garo has few true adjectives. Instead, verbs plus a nominalizing suffix can act as such.

**Verbal.** The simplest form of a verb is constituted by verb root + tense suffix, but several affixes can intercalate between the root and tense marker; some suffixes can even be placed after the latter. Each affix is a morpheme which experience little or no sound change when coming into contact with other morphemes. Verbs do not show any kind of agreement with the subject or the object.

Post-tense suffixes serve to indicate probability, interrogation, quotation, politeness, conditionality and perfective aspect. Pre-tense affixes (intercalated between the root and the tense suffix) are quite numerous and varied. One indicates that the action is directed towards another person, another that the action is in progress, others are reciprocal or causative, others show direction of motion, others are adverbial. Several of these affixes can be used jointly with the same verb, and they generally are placed in a fixed order.

• **tense**: present, past, perfect, future, immediate future. Each of these tenses is marked by a specific tense suffix: -a (present), -a-ha (past), -jok (perfect, change of state), -gen (positive future), -wa (negative future), -gin-ok/-na-jok (immediate or intentional future).

Additional tense/moods are formed by adding the irrealis suffix -chim after some of the tense markers to express a conditional or past perfect sense.

• **mood**: indicative, imperative. A positive command is expressed by adding the suffix -bo to the verb; a negative command by adding the bimorphemic suffix -na-be.

• **adverbs**: many adverbs are formed by reduplication, among them there are many derived from verbs.

**Syntax**

Word order in Garo is mainly Subject-Object-Verb. The verb is almost always in final position but even if the subject more often precedes than follows the object, the order can be changed. The order of noun phrases relative to each other is quite free. Classifiers with numbers usually follow the noun though sometimes precede it. Subordinate clauses precede the main one. Subordination is indicated by special suffixes (-e, -e-ming, etc) added to the verb of the subordinate clause (which lacks a tense suffix). Like many other verb-final languages, Garo employs postpositions.

**Lexicon**

There are many loanwords from Bengali in Garo, specially in the dialects spoken in Bangladesh. Recently the Garo of India has incorporated many words from English.

**Basic Vocabulary**

one: sa
two: gini
three: gittam
four: bri
five: bonga
six: dok
seven: sini
eight: chet
nine: sku
ten: chikung
hundred: ritchasa

father: paa, pagipa
mother: magipa
brother: jongipa ba adatang
sister: nogipa ba abitang
son: depante
daughter: demechik

head: sko
eye: mikron
foot: ja'a
heart: kanchok, katong
tongue: sre, sri, siri
Further Reading