Chapter 1

THE BIATE LANGUAGE AND COMMUNITY

1.0 Introduction

The north-eastern region of India is known for its ethnic, cultural and linguistic diversity. This region comprises seven sister states and a brother state, namely, Assam, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Manipur, Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Sikkim which is home to many ethnic groups with diverse ethnic cultures inhabiting together since time immemorial. Assam, the gateway of north-east India is considered to be a mosaic of races, languages, religions and cultures. Biate is an important ethnic group of Assam, this indigenous community has its own unique tradition, language, culture, dress and exotic way of life. The term 'Biate' is an autonym since it refers to both the community and the language. It is an endangered language of Northeast India which belongs to Tibeto-Burman language family. Racially, Biate people belongs to the Indo-Mongoloid family. The Biates believe that their forefathers migrated to northeast India, from the place called Khurpui 'The Great Cave', also known as Singlung, situated somewhere in China. The migration took place around 12th and 13th centuries. This indigenous group settled in various parts of northeast, India, like Tripura, Mizoram, Manipur before migrating to Assam and Meghalaya. The term Biate is said to have been derived from the word *Biete* where *bie* means 'speak' or 'worship' and *-te* is a derivational suffix deriving the word *biete* meaning 'speaker' or 'worshipper'. They were called Biate, after a group of people known as Koilom (alternate name Kawilam), had worshiped a large python at a village called Rulchawm in Mizoram. Biate people are also known by different names by neighbouring communities; for instance, Bedesa by the Dimasas, Beite by the Thadous, Hadem by the Khasis, Baites by the Bengalis, etc, (Ngamlai 2014). The natives however prefer to call themselves as Biate.

1.1 Population and Demographic distribution

Biate speakers are mainly found in the Dima Hasao district of Assam, the Jaintia Hills in Meghalaya, and some parts of Tripura, Mizoram, and Manipur. In Assam, the Biates reside mainly in the following villages: Fiangpui, New Sangbar, Old Sangbar, Thingdol, Khobak, Lengpui, Vaitang, Mualdam, Khothlir, etc of Dima Hasao district. In Meghalaya, Biate is spoken in: Mualsei, Saipung, Thuruk, Saizol, Saibual, Ribuk, Mualhoi, Mualcheng, Saron

etc. The land inhabited by the Biate is called as *Biateram* by themselves which means Land of the Biate. *Biateram* lies approximately between 25º5' and 25º30' North Latitude and between 92º28' and 93º East Longitude and covers roughly between Denloi river in the East and Lunar river in the West, and between Diyung and Dihangi rivers in the North and Cachar and Bangladesh in the South (Lalsim 1998). Biates are recognized as Scheduled Tribes (Hill) by the Constitution of India in Assam. Currently, the Biate is spoken mainly in the Dima Hasao district of Assam and the Jaintia Hills in Meghalaya. The map of Dima Hasao district shown in Figure 1.1., indicates the areas where the Biates reside by the red spot in and around Halflong and Umrangso.
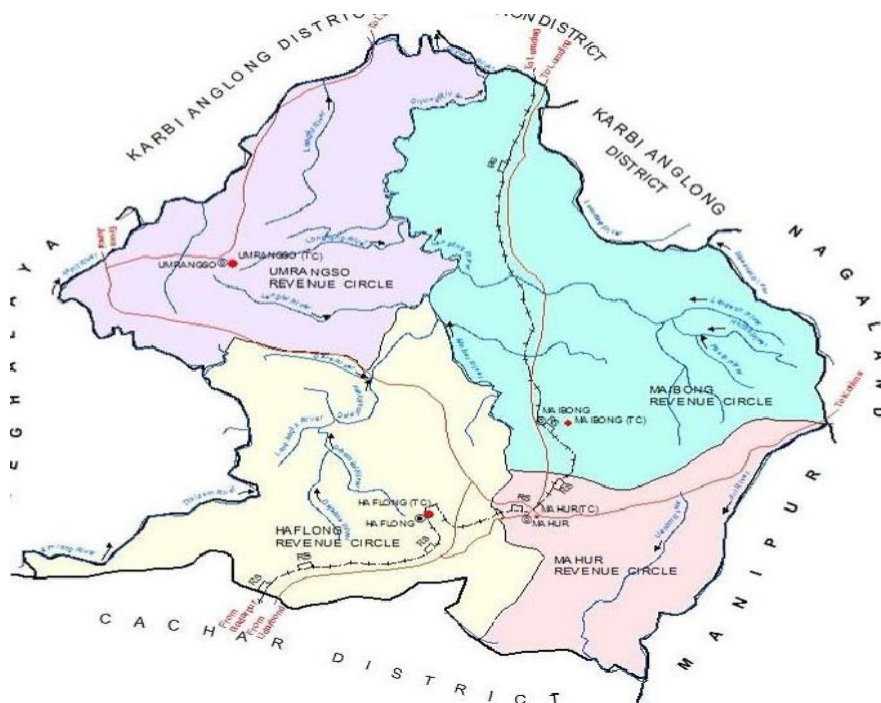

Figure 1.1: Map of Dima Hasao Distri

According to the SIL Ethnologue (2017), the current Biate population is 19,000 (approx.) in northeast, India. It may be noted that in the Census Report of India (2011), Biate population count does not figure. In the Dima Hasao district of Assam, the Biate population is 6000 approximately. This population count was verified at the local level during my fieldwork.[i]

1.2 Linguistic Affiliation

Biate is a Kuki-Chin (Central Kuki) language that belongs to the Tibeto-Burman language family. It has close affinities with Mizo, Hrangkhol, Khelma, Hmar and Darlong. The earliest genetic classification of Biate was made by Grierson (1904). He used the term Bētē to refer to the Biate community as well as the language. According to him, the Biate language belongs to the Old Kuki sub-group of the Tibeto-Burman language family. He further observes that this tribe is closely connected with the Hrangkhols. Lt. Colonel J. Shakespear (1912) also observes that the Biate language falls under the Old Kuki sub-group of the Tibeto-Burman family of languages. Grierson (1904) subdivides into four main groups of Kuki-Chin languages, i.e., Northern, Central, Southern, and Old Kuki; see Figure 1.2 below.
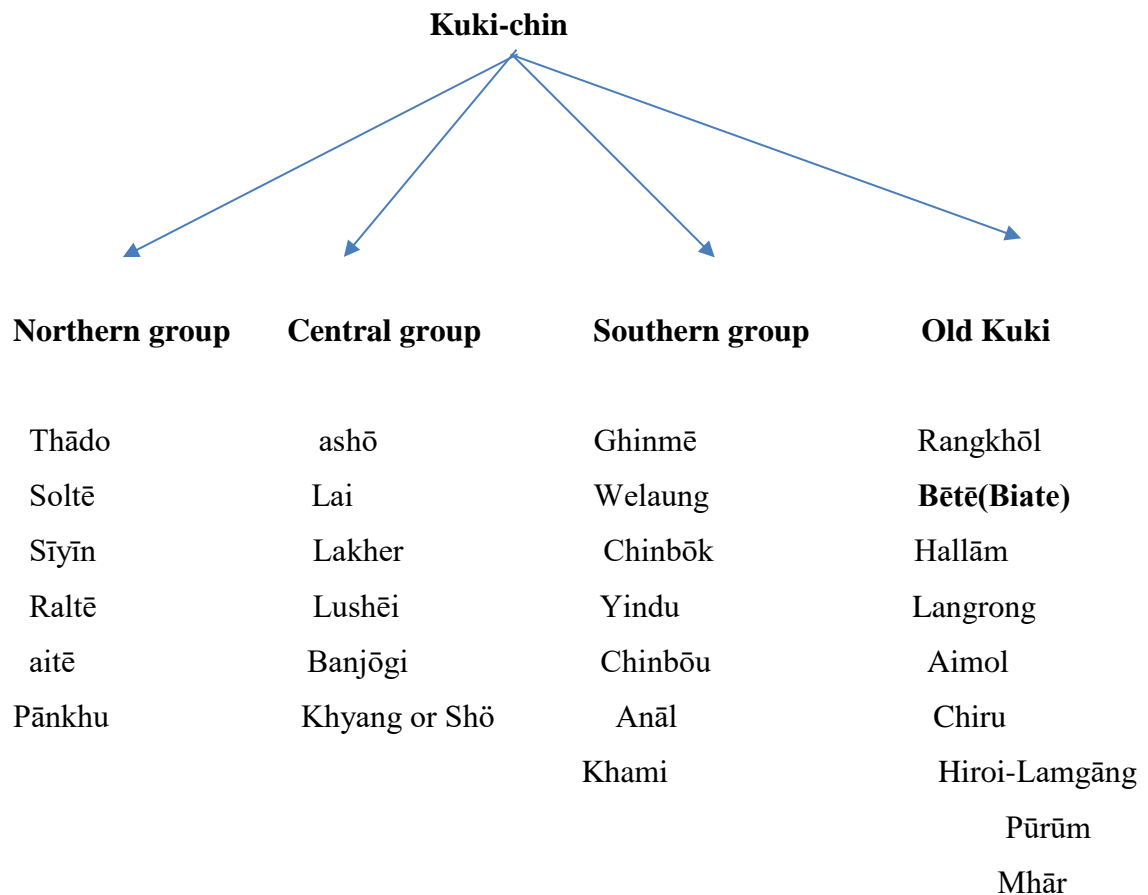
Kuki-chin

Northern group	Central group	Southern group	Old Kuki
Thādo	ashō	Ghinmē	Rangkhōl
Soltē	Lai	Welaung	**Bētē(Biate)**
Sīyīn	Lakher	Chinbōk	Hallām
Raltē	Lushēi	Yindu	Langrong
aitē	Banjōgi	Chinbōu	Aimol
Pānkhu	Khyang or Shö	Anāl	Chiru
		Khami	Hiroi-Lamgāng
			Pūrūm
			Mhār

Figure 1.2 Classifications of the Kuki-Chin Languages (Grierson, 1904*)

Shafer (1955) classifies Biate as a Western unit of the Old Kukish group. Post and Burling (2017) validates Van Bik (2007) 's classification of Kuki-Chin (Kukish) into three groups: Central, Maraic, North-western and Peripheral. Biate falls in the Central group and then in

the Mizo sub-group as illustrated in the Ethnologue by Simons and Fennig (2018): Biate > Mizo > Central Kuki > Kuki-Chin > Tibeto-Burman.

1.2.1 Linguistic Situation of Biate in the Dima Hasao District

Biates are multilingual and they can speak Hindi, Haflong Hindi[ii], a lingua-franca is used by the indigenous communities in Dima Hasao district, and English, besides their mother tongue. Very few Biates can speak and understand Assamese and Bengali which are the state's official and associate official languages. In Dima Hasao, the community has started a program called 'Mother Tongue Education' towards the retention of their language. Under this program, Biate is taught as an additional subject at the primary level (Stages 1 and 2). However, in other parts of northeast, the Biates are fast shifting to the Mizo language. As per UNESCO the Biate language has the index of *definitely endangered* and its Ethnologue code is **ISO 639-3 biu**.

1.3 The Biate Community

Biate community members are basically agrarian. Shifting cultivation is one of the techniques mostly used by the Biate people. The tradition of hunting wild animals was prevalent in the community. Biates are foragers and they collect edible fruits, vegetables and herbs from the wild. The community continues to practice shifting cultivation. However, the scale of cultivation is gradually decreasing as most people opt for jobs outside their villages. Since most of the community members have converted to Christianity; most of the traditional and cultural practices have undergone change. This is reflected in their food habits, dress and ornaments.

1.3.1 Biate Clans

According to Lalsim (2012)[iii], every Biate village is administered under the traditional council called *Siarkalim Devan.* Over the *Siarkalim* council is the supreme council called *Laldevan* or *Namringa Devan,* meaning court of the five clans. The court of five clans signifies the five clans of the Biates, such as – i. Nampui, ii. Darnei, iii. Ngamlai, iv. Lalsim, and v. Thiaite (Theite). The five clans and their sub-clans are shown in Table 1.1 below:

Biate Clans	Biate Sub-Clans
Nampui	Don-Chungngol, Thianglai, Munring, Fatlai, Vankal, Rangchal, Pungte, and Kungte.
Darnei	Thangbei, Khoreng (Tlungur) and Lungoi.
Ngamlai	Durpui, Ranglem, Sonlen and Jamate
Lalsim	Ngirsim, Ngaite, Jate, Riamte and Chonsim
Thiaite	Failing, Ralvong, Taizang, Sumbuma and Khampuia

Table 1.1. Biate Clans and Sub-Clans

Before conversion to Christianity, the five Biate clans and their sub-clans used to worship their respective gods and deities. They, however, have retained their own identity embodied in their language, custom, traditional beliefs, traditional dresses, dances, songs, musical instruments, folktales and so on.

1.3.2 Food Habits

Rice is the staple food of the Biates. It is served with chillies and vegetables like pumpkins, beans, yam, arum roots, bamboo shoots, plantain flower, saag 'green leaves', fruits, mushroom and fungi of various species. As far as the food gathering from the nearby jungles is concerned, they have vast knowledge of the kind of fruit, vegetable and herbs that are beneficial for their health and wellbeing. Depending on the seasons, they know quite well what to collect from the wild. The Biate community used to make their local drink from rice. There are four kinds of rice beer: i. *Baitui*, ii. *Zu Ning*, a fine distilled rice beer, iii. *Rakzu,* a strong distilled spirit, and iv. *Zu-Phok*, a type beer made from special flavor rice which is half-solid and half- liquid. However, preparations of any kind *zu* 'local beer' have come to a halt in the Biate society of the present day. The church has a set of guidelines now, as per these guidelines, such traditional drinks are discouraged. Zu has been replaced entirely by tea amongst the Biates now.

1.3.3 Dress and Ornaments

Traditional dresses of the Biates, in the former days, were very simple. Men had three type of abdomen wrapper: *puanbom* 'loin cloth', *diar* similar to 'dhuti' and *kaipereng*, 'a thin

flap of cloth for covering the private part'. The other apparel consisted of a simple white collar less shirt and a headgear. The headgear was made of white cotton clothe. The clothe is about two meters in length and its width was about the size of two palms. The border of the white turban used to have patterns. This cloth was wrapped around the head and fastened on the left side by letting out the two-palm size of its ends in which one-end reached up to the back of the person wearing it. In winter a shawl called *rilungpuan* made from silk was commonly worn to keep them warm. Men used to sport long hair which used to be drawn back and tied in a knot at the back. Occasionally, long brass hairpin was fastened on the knot. Men used to have their ears pierced in which they would wear a flower. Normally, women were clad in two pieces of cloth, extending from the waist to just above the knee, and another cloth from the breast to the waist. The torso cover was called *tangvel*[iv] and the lower one is *puanbom*[v]. The other apparel was *choipuan* like a 'chaddar' worm cross-wise on the shoulder. Biate women wore ornaments to adorn themselves. They used to wear three types of necklaces: i. *Rithei tial* which had a number of strings made of varieties of tiny beads falling low down over the breasts, ii. *theival*, a necklace of amber orange in colour, and iii. *sum-rithei,* ' a chain made of coins'. The ear ornament was principally a brass-circled ring called *Kuarbet*. Women generally let their loose at the back and adorned it with a circular hair band made from deep reddish coloured cane called *Ritai*. Besides, the women wore *zakser*, 'armlet' and *banbun* 'bangle'. The traditional attires and ornaments are worn occasionally during festivals.

1.3.4   Marriage System in Biate

Biate society practiced endogamy for marriage. They used to encourage cross-cousin marriage. The Biate society practiced monogamy and polygamy was a taboo. Marriage by negotiation or love is the prevailing practice among the Biates, even today. Traditionally, when a boy wishes to marry a girl of his choice and they are in love with each other; the boy can send his parents or a negotiater to negotiate with the girl's parents. If the girl's family agrees to give their daughter for marriage, they fix the day of marriage which is solemnized in a Church. There is a customary payment called *man* 'bride price' which is to be paid by bridegroom's parent to the bride's father in the presence and guidance of the *Khochor*, the customary guardian of the village. The value of this customary payment is Rs. 9.5 paise. Along with *man* a bronze plate called *mairang* is offered to the bride.

1.4 Overview of Biate Language

1.4.1 Phonological Overview

Biate has 23 consonant phonemes. It has nine plosives, five fricatives, one lateral fricative, three nasals, one lateral, one tap, three affricates. An interesting aspect of Biate consonantal inventory is the presence of voiceless retroflex affricate specified for [± aspiration]. i.e., unaspirated /ʈʂ/ and aspirated / ʈʂʰ/. These two consonants are very common in this language. The contrastive distribution of the aspirated and unaspirated retroflex affricates can be noticed in the following examples: /ʈʂi/'fear', /ʈʂʰi/ 'cause to fear', /ʈʂul/ 'fall', /ʈʂʰul/ 'cause to fall' and so on. These sounds are reported in Mandarin Chinese (Zhao & Li 2009: 575-583) and in some other Sino-Tibetan languages like Damu, Daofu, Mawo, Sak, Cuona, Bai, Baima, Gasu, Lalo, Li, Lolopho, Nasu, Naxi, etc. (Namkung 1996), Ersu (Zhang 2013), and Hmong languages (Neukom 1999).

	Bilabial	Labio-dental		Alveolar		Velar	Glotal
Plosive	p b			t d		k	ʔ
Aspirated	pʰ			tʰ		kʰ	
Nasal	m			n		ŋ	
Fricative		f	v	s	z		H
Affricate				ʧ	ʈʂ		
Aspirated					ʈʂʰ		
Tap					ɾ		
Lateral				l	ɬ		

Table 1.2 Consonants in Biate (from Brahma & Boro, 2018)

All the plosives can occur in word initial, medial and final position except /pʰ/, /b/, /tʰ/, /d/, /kʰ/ and /ʔ/. /pʰ/, /b/, /tʰ/, /d/, /kʰ/ cannot occur word finally while the glottal stop /ʔ/ occurs only in word final position. Nasals in Biate can occur in the three position of a word. Fricatives /f /, /v/, /s/, /z/, /h/, /ɬ/ and affricate /ʧ/, /ʈʂ/, /ʈʂʰ/ only occur in the word initial and

medial position. Liquids /l/ and /ɾ/ can occur in all the position. The voiced velar stop /g/ is not attested in the language, which is a prototypical phonological feature of the Kuki-Chin languages. It can be noted here that the lateral fricative /ɬ/ phoneme is very prominent in the language. However, the presence of the voiceless retroflex affricates /ʈʂ/ and /ʈʂʰ/ are special features of Biate which are absent in the closely related languages, viz. Hrangkhol and Khelma, though they are attested in Mizo.

The language has five vowels, and all the vowels can occur in all the positions within a syllable. They can occur in both open and closed syllables. All the vowel phonemes of Biate can occur in all the three positions, i.e., initial, medial and final of the words. For e.g. /**i**n/ 'house' / kʰ**i**n/ 'point out' /tʰ**i**/ 'die'.

	Front	Central	Back
High	i		u
Mid	e		o
Low		a	

Table 1.3. Biate vowels

Biate has four diphthongs : /ui/, /ei/, /oi/ and /ai/. The diphthongs can occur only in open syllables in Biate. out of the four diphthongs, /oi/ doesn't occur in word-initial position in Biate.

Vowel sequence is very common in Biate. Although Biate has four distinct diphthongs, the sequence of the vowel is also permitted in the language. The possible sequences are /-iu-/, /-ie-/, /-ia-/, /-eu-/, /-ea-/, /-ae-/, /-au-/, /-oa-/, /-ua-/, /-ue-/.

Most of the Kuki-Chin languages lack consonant clusters, and Biate is not an exception. Consonant Geminates are commonly found in this language. A total of five different geminates found mostly in the derived environment. For e.g.

/-pp-/, /-tt-/, /-kk-/, /-nn-/, /-mm-/.

The basic syllabic patterns in Biate are V, CV, VC, and CVC. For e.g.

V   /a/   'he/she/it'

CV   /bu/   'cooked rice'

VC   /in/   'house'

CVC /paɾ/   'flower'

In Biate, monosyllabic, disyllabic and trisyllabic words can be found. Disyllabic is the most productive syllabic sequence pattern in the language. However, most of the root structures are found in the monosyllabic pattern. It has also been observed that Biate also has three types of tones, viz. high, level, and low tones. For e.g. /sir/ 'report' /sir/ 'step'   /sir/ 'chop'

Phonological processes such as vowel deletion and vowel alternation are also observed in Biate. Adjectives in Biate are formed with the prefixation of a-. However, when it is compounded with another noun ending in a vowel as a second member, the prefix a- is deleted. For example,

Vowel deletion:

/ipa + a͡ʂha/   'man + good'   [ipa-t͡ʂha]   'nice man'

On the other hand, when the first member of the word ends with a consonant and gets compounded with the second member, the vowel /a/ is replaced or altered with /i/ in the second members of the root. For e,g.

Vowel alternation:

/imeŋ + atʃin/   'cat + small'   [imeŋ-itʃin]   'small cat'

If the first person pronominal prefix *ki-* or second pronominal prefix *ni-* is followed by a word which begins with *ɾi-* as initial syllable then the pronominal prefixes endings with /i/ vowel is changed to /e/. These are illustrated as follows:

Vowel deletion and alternation:

/ki + ɾimiŋ/   '1SG + name'   >   /keɾmiŋ/   'my name'

/ni + ɾimiŋ/   '2SG + name'   >   /neɾmiŋ/   'your name'

/ki + ɾikha/   '1SG + chin'   >   /keɾkha/   'my chin'

1.4.2. Morphological Overview

A morpheme is the smallest meaningful element of language that, as a basic phonological and semantic element cannot be reduced into the smallest elements (Bussamann 1998). Morphemes in Biate can be classified into root and affix. The smallest meaningful unit may be the root of a word or meaningful affixes Most of the basic words in Biate are of the disyllabic form. Prefix and suffix are added to the basic form to derive new words in the language. In Biate, Basic Nouns, Derived Nouns and Compound Nouns can be found. Derived nouns are formed by the processes of prefixation and suffixation. There are four monosyllabic patterns and all four monosyllabic patterns can also constitute a syllabic unit of a disyllabic or a polysyllabic word in it. The disyllabic pattern is very productive in the language. Some of the interesting features in the syllabic pattern can be seen in some of the word classes. The morpheme -*i* is added to the monosyllabic verb and -*a* is prefixed to the monosyllabic noun. The prefixes to the verb and noun behave as word formative since the monosyllabic word is less productive and these word formative prefixes are added to make the word disyllabic. The nouns are also derived by the process of suffixation and prefixation and in compound nouns, the two processes are very common i.e. noun + noun and noun + adjective. Grammatical gender in Biate is indicated by the gender markers: -*pa* 'masculine' and -*nu* 'feminine' as shown in (1) below.

1.   ki – nai – pa   futbol   a – rdai – ŋai

         1SG–child–MASC   football   3SG – play – HAB

         'My son plays football.'

1.4.2.1 Root words

A root or base in Biate is in two forms. They are free and bound roots. Free roots are independent and meaningful in nature and they are mostly nouns of Biate word class. On the other, bound roots are affixes which may be grammatically useful but can't stand alone and need other morphemes to be a meaningful word. Most of the free roots in Biate are nouns and bound morphemes are usually verbs and other word classes.

1.4.2.2 Free roots

Free roots in Biate are mainly found in proper names, names of animals, body parts etc. Free roots can occur independently without any grammatical affixes. Free roots in Biate are mainly monosyllabic in nature and it is shown in Table 1.4.

Body parts		Names of animals, Insects			
Biate	**Gloss**	**Biate**	**Gloss**	**Biate**	**Gloss**
mit	'eye'	*ui*	'dog'	*pa*	'father'
lu	'head'	*vok*	'pig'	*nu*	'mother'
ru	'bone'	*kel*	'goat'	*nai*	'child'
phu	'belly'	*rik*	'louse'	*pu*	'grandfather'
mai	'face'	*ar*	'fowl'	*pi*	'grandmothe'r
ner	'lip'				

Table 1.4. Free roots

1.4.2.3 Bound roots

Bound roots are productive in Biate. Most of the adjectives in Biate are bound roots. Some nouns in Biate have also bound roots. All the kinship terms and colour terms are bound roots. Kinship terms are always prefixed with pronominal prefixes *–ki,-kin, -ni, -nin, a- and –an* and adjectives are prefixed with an attributive marker *–a*. Table 1.5 provides a few examples of bound roots in Biate.

Adjective Colour Terms		Adjective Terms	
Biate	**Gloss**	**Biate**	**Gloss**
a-ŋoi	white	*a-ta*	beautiful
a-eŋ	yellow	*a-lian*	big
a-sen	red	*a-mol*	blunt
a-dum	blue	*a-hai*	brave
a-haŋ	black	*a-var*	clever

Table 1.5. Bound roots

1.4.2.4 Nominalization

Nominalized verb and adjective is productive in Biate. Most of the verb and adjective can form noun with suffixing nominalizer –*na* to it. Table 1.6 shows the suffixation of nominalizer –*na* to the verb and Adjective in Bate.

Verbs - Adjectives	Gloss	Nominalizer	Biate	Gloss
thuŋ	'sit'	-na	thuŋna	'chair'
ṭoŋtai	'pray'	-na	ṭoŋtaina	'prayer'
nat	'pain'	-na	natna	'diseases'
riat	'know'	-na	riatna	'knowledge'
arat	'strong'	-na	ratna	'strength'
iṭam	'hungry'	-na	ṭamna	'hunger'
asa	'thick'	-na	asana	'thickness'

Table 1.6. Nominalization

1.4.2.5 Number

Generally, a noun is singular in form in Biate. There is only one plural marker in the language i.e. -*hei* suffixed to the singular form of nouns to form a plural noun. For example

2.   izoŋ + hei   izoŋ-hei

          monkey + PL   'monkeys'

3.   motor +hei   car-hei

          car +PL   cars

1.4.2.6. Pronouns

Pronouns are words which can form a distinct class of substantive and can stand alone to fill the position of a noun. There is a pronominal contrast between first, second and third persons, without gender distinction. Gender is not marked in Biate pronouns. Pronouns in Biate are personal pronouns, possessive pronoun, reflexive pronouns, demonstrative pronouns, indefinite pronouns and interrogative pronouns

1.4.2.6.1 Subject Pronoun

All the subject pronouns can take plural marker *-ni* to denote the plurality in the language. Biate has three third person singular pronouns: *ama* 's/he', *him-pa* 'he-masc' and *him-nu* 'she-fem'. The third person singular pronoun *ama* is used in formal context and *himpa* and *himnu* are used in informal context. The subject pronouns in Biate are given in Table 1.7.

Person	Singular		Plural	
First	keima	'I'	keima-ni	'we' (exclusive)
			eima-ni	'we' (inclusive)
Second	naŋma	'you'	naŋma-ni	'you'
Third	ama	'he/she/it'	anma-ni	'they'
	himpa	'he'		
	himnu	'she'		

Table 1.7. Subject Pronoun

1.4.2.6.2 Object Pronouns

First and third persons object pronouns in Biate have clitic forms *ne-* and *va-* respectively; but, the second person *naŋ* 'you' occurs as a free morpheme. The object pronouns in Biate does not have number distinction.

Person	Object pronoun
First	ne - 'me/us'
Second	naŋ 'you'
Third	fa-/va- 'him/her/them'

Table 1.8: Object Pronoun

4.   a-ne-mu

3SG-1-see

'He saw me/us'

5.   a-fa-mu

3SG-3P-see

'She/he saw her/him/them'

6.   keima-n   zu   ki-va-pe-k

1P-ERG   wine   1P-3P-give-DECL

'I gave him/her/them wine.'

7.   naŋ   ki-mu

2SG   1SG-see

'I saw you.'

1.4.2.6.3. Demonstrative Pronouns

Demonstrative pronouns in Biate are formed by adding the proximal marker -*hiʔ* and distal marker -*so* to the third person pronoun *ama* 's/he'.

Demonstrative Pronoun	Singular	Gloss	Plural	Gloss
Proximal	ama-hiʔ	'this'	ama-hei-hiʔ	'these'
Distal	ama-so	'that'	ama-hei-so	'those'

Table 1.9. Demonstrative Pronoun

The position of demonstrative pronoun in the sentence structure is shown in the examples below. Biate follows DEM-N pattern in the language i.e., demonstrative precedes the noun in the phrase.

8. ama-hiʔ   tʰeihai   a-ni-t
    3P-PROX   mango   3SG-be-DECL
    'This is a mango.'

9. ama-so   tʰeihai   a-ni-t
    3P-DIST   mango   3SG-be-DECL
    'That is a mango.'

10. ama-hei-hiʔ   tʰeihai   an-ni-t
    3P-PL-PROX   mango   3PL-be-DECL
    'These are the mangoes.'

11. ama-hei-so   tʰeihai   an-ni-t
    3P-PL-DIST   mango   3PL-be-DECL
    'Those are the mangoes.'

1.4.2.6.4 Interrogative Pronouns

There are different kinds of interrogative pronouns found in the languages. All the interrogative pronouns are bound roots and it obligatorily takes the interrogative marker *-m*. The interrogative marker has two allomorphs *-im* and *-am* for closed syllables. Depending on the vowel in the closed syllable *-im* or *-am* occurs. Question words which occur with [+animate] nouns take the following constituent order:

Interrogative pronoun + question marker + plural marker

Interrogative pronoun	Plural	Question Marker	Question Word
tu		-m	tum 'who'
tu	hei	-im	tuheiim 'who'
i		-m	im 'what'
tak		-am	tak-am 'where'
tik		-im	tikim 'when'
iŋkʰa		-m	iŋkʰam 'how'

Table 1.10. Interrogative Pronoun

Interrogative pronoun + plural marker + demonstrative pronoun + question marker

In Table 1.11, the proximal marker - *hiʔ* and distal marker *-so* follows the plural marker hei and precedes the question marker *-m* to derive question words. The glottal fricative / ʔ / gets dropped when the question marker *-m* suffixes to the derived question words.

Interrogative Pronoun	Plural	Demonstrative Pronoun	Question Marker	Question Word
i	hei	hiʔ	-m	iheihim 'what'
tu	hei	hiʔ	-m	tuheihim 'who'
tu	hei	hiʔ	-m	tuheisom 'which'
tu	hei	so	-m	uheisom 'which'

Table 1.11. Interrogative Pronoun

1.4.2.7 Adjectives

The basic adjective forms in Biate are bound roots. Adjectives are derived with the prefixation of formative prefix *a-*.to the adjectival roots. Table 1.12. provides a few examples.

Adjectival marker	Root	Adjective	
a-	ʧin	aʧin	'small'
a-	kʰa	akʰa	'Bitter'
a-	łom	ałom	'Cheap'
a-	koŋ	akoŋ	'thin'
a-	lian	alian	'big'
a-	min	amin	'ripe'

Table 1.12. Adjectives

In (12-15) we have examples of adjectival predicates. The copular ni 'be' is obligatorily dropped in adjectival predicates in Biate.

12. lekʰabu   a-sa

      book   ADJM-thick

      'Book is thick.'

13. sara   a-koŋ

      sara   ADJM-thin

      'Sara is thin.'

14. a-la-vaŋ

      ADJM-still-young

      'He/She is still young.'

15. ni-la-vaŋ

      ADJM-still-young

      'You are still young.'

Generally, an adjective showing degree of comparison is divided into three types: positive, comparative and superlative degree. A positive degree is a normal form of adjective in Biate. There is no marker for the positive degree. Biate uses the degree marker *-ual* to indicate the comparative degree. To indicate superlative degree, the degree marker *-ual* is followed by the intensifier *-tak*. Table 1.13 shows the comparative and superlative degree markers in Biate.

Positive	Comparative	Superlative
asei 'tall'	asei-ual 'taller'	asei-ual-tak 'tallest'
atoi 'short'	atoi-ual 'shorter'	atoi-ual-tak 'shortest'
aʧʰa 'good'	aʧʰa-ual 'better'	aʧʰa-ualtak 'best'

Table 1.13. Degree of Comparison

For example:

16. ɾama-hiʔ   sita   ɾaŋin a-duŋ   a-sei-ual
    ram-PROX   sita   than ADJM-high adjm-tall-DEG
    Lit: Ram is taller than Sita in height.
    'Ram is taller than Sita.'

17. sita-hiʔ ɾama   ɾaŋin   a-duŋ   a-toi-ual
    sita-PROX ram   than   ADJM-height   ADJM-short-DEG
    'Sita is shorter than Ram.'

18. ki-mal-hei   laia   keima   a-sei-ual-tak   ki-ni-t
    1SG-friend-PL   among   1P   ADJM-tall- DEG-INT   1SG-be-DECL
    'I am one of the tallest among my friends.'

19. sita-hiʔ   an-laia   a-dung   a-toi-ual-tak   a-va-ni-t
    sita-PROX   3PL-among   ADJM-height   ADJM-short-DEG-INT   3SG-them-be-DECL
    'Sita is shortest among them'

1.4.2.8 Verbs

Morphologically there are three kinds of verbs found in Biate i.e., basic form of verbs, derived verbs and compound verbs. These are discussed below:

1.4.2.8.1 Basic Verbs

The monosyllabic basic verbs in Biate are bound roots which are mostly monosyllables. The verbal prefixes *i-* and *ɾi-* affix to the verb root to form disyllabic verbs as shown below.

Monosyllabic verbs:

i-bik   'bark (dog)'
i-bon   'close'
i-but   'boil'
i-di   'like'
i-en   'look'

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Disyllabic verbs

ɾi-dai	'play'
ɾi-kal	'buld'
ɾi-ʧin	'add'

1.4.2.8.2 Derived Verbs

Derived verbs are formed by adding an affix in Biate. The causative verbs are derived form in the language.

Causative Verbs

The morpheme *in-* is prefixed to a verb to give the causative reading in the language. In the sentence construction we can see that as soon as the verb gets prefixed by the morpheme *in-*the valency of the sentence increases. Table 1.14 shows the derivation of causative verbs in the language.

Causative marker	Verb	Causative verb	Gloss
in	ʈ͡ʂap	inʈ͡ʂap	cause to cry
in	hul	inhul	make dry
in	ʈ͡ʂuŋ	inʈ͡ʂuŋ	Cause to sit
in	ɾitʰol	inɾitʰol	Cause to be loose'

Table1.14. Causative verb

The following examples show the causative verbs in Biate sentences:

Transitive verb	**Causative verb**
20a. ki-ʈ͡ʂap	20b. ke-n-ʈ͡ʂap
1SG-cry	1SG-CAUS-cry
'I cry'	'I made (him) to cry.'

19

21a. iŋa   a-ʧaɾ-tak   21b. ki-nu-n   iŋa   a-n-ʧar

fish   3SG-dry-PRF   1-mother-ERG fish   3SG-CAUS-dry

'The fish has dried.'   'Mother made the fish dry.'

Biate has lexical causatives as shown in Table 1.15.

Non-causative Verb	Causative Verb
tʰi 'die'	tʰat 'kill'
t͡ʂul 'fall down'	t͡ʂʰul 'make fall down'
t͡ʂi 'fear'	t͡ʂʰi 'cause to fear/ frighten'

Table 1.15. Lexical Causative

1.4.2.8.3 Compound Verbs

      Compund verbs in Biate has two constituent order: i. **V + V > V**, and ii. **V + V + IMP > V**.

            hoŋ +   łan +   >   'hoŋ-łan'

            come +   run   +   >   'come running'

            hoŋ +   lam +   >   'hoŋ-łan'

            come +   dance +   >   'come and dance'

For example:

22.   a-hoŋ-łan-tak

       3SG-come-run-PRF

       'He (just) came running.'

V + V + IMP > V

            hoŋ +   fa   +   ɾoʔ >   hoŋ-fa-ɾoʔ

            come +   eat +   IMP >   'come and eat (imperative)'

            hoŋ +   la   +   ɾoʔ >   hoŋ-fa-ɾoʔ

come	+	take	+	IMP	>	'come and take (imperative)'
at	+	kʰiak	+	ɾoʔ	>	at-kʰiak-ɾoʔ
cut	+	break	+	IMP	>	'cut and break (imperative)'
hoŋ	+	łan	+	ɾoʔ	>	'hoŋ-łan-ɾoʔ'
come	+	run	+	IMP	>	'come running (imperative)'

1.4.2.9 Adverbs

Adverbs are verbal modifiers and they are of basic than derived forms. Basic forms are similar to adjectives as in *raŋ* 'fast (A)/fast (Adv)' and *zam* 'slow/slowly'.

23. razu   a-nek   raŋ
    Raju   eat   fast
    'Raju eats fast.'

24. ruasur   a-hoŋ- raŋ   zel
    Rain   3SG-come-FUT   soon
    'Rain will come soon.'
    .

Adverbs can be derived from adjectives with suffixation with the intensifier *-tak* and the adverbializer *-kan* as in, *enehoi-tak-kan* 'lovely' and *tʰlai-tak-kan* 'lately'.

1.4.2.9.1 Types of Adverbs

Adverbs in Biate are categorized into the following types: time, place and manner as shown in the examples (25 – 29)

Time

25. **naŋtuk**   keima   dilli-a   fe-ɻaŋ ki-ni-t
    tomorrow   1SG   Delhi-LOC   go-FUT 1SG-be-DECL
    'I will go to Delhi tomorrow.'

26. **atun** ki-hoŋ-mai   insuŋ

   now   1SG-come-PROG home

   'I am coming home now?'

Place

27. **taka-m**   ki-fe-r̥aŋ

   Where-Q   1SG-go-FUT

   'Where will I go?'

Manner

28.) pasal-te-n   **huaisen-tak-kan**   ram-a   ai-fe

   man-DIM-ERG brave-INT-ADVR   forest-LOC   3SG-cross

   'The boy went to the jungle bravely.'

29. **tʰa-tak-in**   in-roʔ

   nice-INT-ADVR   drink-IMP

   Lit: 'Drink nicely.'

   'Enjoy your drink.'

In Biate the morpheme *-tak* is homophonous, it can be used for different morphological functions such as *–tak* denotes perfective aspect as well as it also functions as an intensifier.

1.5 Review of Biate Literature

Not much work is available with regards linguistic and grammatical description of the Biate language. Mr. Ramdina Lalsim, a native Biate speaker, has written a book on their folk tales titled '*Folktales of the Biates'* (2010). He documents and shows several folk tales of the Biate. Previously, he had written on the origin and historical background of the Biate in 1995. Rev. Thiaite (2005), Ngamlai (2014) and few others have worked on some non-linguistic topics. These writers are native speakers of Biate and has a notable understanding of Biate life and culture. Bhrama, D & Boro. R.R (2017) have authored *Biate Trong Resaina Bu* the Learner's book of the Biate language. This book is one of the publication by the Centre for Endangered Languages,(CFEL) Tezpur University. The book provides: (i) an outline of the Biate sound system, (ii). a sketch of the basic grammatical categories of the Biate language

and (iii) some folklores of the community. Besides the learner's book; CFEL, Tezpur University has also published a 'Lesser Studied Languages series: three volumes have been published by CFEL. Vol I Eds Patgiri, Gope and Sarangthem (2021), Vol II Eds. Nath, Longmailai and Shougrapham (2021) and Vol III Eds. Barbora and Borah (2021. These volumes provide accounts of (i) phonetics and phonology (ii) morphology and (iii) syntax of Biate along with six other lesser - known languages of Northeast, India[vi].

Grierson *Linguistic survey of India* (1904) presents short notes on the pronominal system and verbs of Biate. Grierson concludes that Biate is closely related to Rangkhol (Hrangkhol), Hallam, and Langrong. According to Grierson (ibid) plurals in the language is formed by adding suffix *ni-* to the personal pronoun *kei-ma* 'I' in *kei-ma–ni* is 'we' and a personal pronoun *nang-ma* 'you' with the suffix *'ni'* *nang-ma-ni* is you (you two). Grierson also presents a brief discussion on the pronominal system of Biate, viz. *ka* 'first person', *na* 'second person' and *a* 'third person'. According to Grierson (ibid) the past tense is marked by *-ta* or *-tak,* as in *a-hong-ta* 'he came'. Similarly, the future tense is marked by *-rang* as in *kei fe-rang* 'I shall go'. Grierson also attributes *-ro* to be the imperative marker in Biate as in *hongjoi- ro* 'bring', *fe-no-ro* 'Don't go'. Grierson considers *mak* and *noni* to be the negative markers in the language as in *kei ka-fe-ta-mak* 'I-went-not', *kei kafe- no-ning* 'I will not go'. In addition to Grierson's short notes in Biate discussed so far, a short vocabulary of Biate can also be found from the works of Stewart (1855) and Soppitt (1877).

Upa Ngamthangkhupa Darnei published a book titled *"Biate Literature neh Grammar bu"* in 2017. He discussed the need, importance and the policy and plan which was taken in the past for the development of Biate literature. He broadly divides the book into four sections. The first three section deals with the alphabet, importance and origin of language, and compare Biate with cognate languages (like Mizo, Hmar etc.). Some of the pioneer's stories are also included in the book. The last section discussed some grammatical rules and function in Biate. He explains the use of pronouns in Biate and gives the examples of correct and incorrect use of pronouns with possessive in Biate. He illustrates personal pronouns with examples where the language has first, second and third person with singular and plural form. According to N Darnei Biate has *ki, kin* as first person singular and plural, *ni, nin* as second person, and *a, an* as third person singular and plural. He also briefly discusses the parts of speech, tense and some simple sentences. The book is in vernacular medium.

1.6 Methodology

This thesis is based on primary data collected by the researchers[vii] of CFEL, Tezpur University. Five field trips were conducted in the two villages viz. Fiangpui and Mualdam in Dima Hasao district. The number of households is approximately 300 in Fiangpui village and 100 in Mualdam. Biate people also inhabit in some villages like New Sangbar, Old Sangbar, Thingdol, Khobak, Lengpui, Vaitang, and Khothlier of Dima Hasao district. Data was collected from thirty-one informants of different age groups and gender. All the data were cross-checked two to three times. Besides, the random techniques were used to elicit maximum native words from several semantic domains such as religion and ritual terms, kinship, house artifacts, traditional cloths and ornaments, traditional food items, etc. A high-quality portable audio recorder Olympus Multi-Track PCM LS-100, was used for recording the data. The recorder was connected with an external microphone, and recorded data were transferred to a portable PC (HP Probook Core i7). A digital camera (Canon DSLR 1100D) and the inbuilt camera of a Samsung Galaxy J7 smartphone were used to capture various (indigenous) objects in the field. We also used photographs for the best illustrations of the data; in some cases, handmade drawings and sketches were also used to collect detailed information for example, the cultural items, furniture items, fish, birds, animals, etc. from the native speakers. Data elicitation was done by interviewing the informants using the wordlist and sentence list. For every lexical item, at least three iterations were recorded. The texts recorded on tape were also transcribed, and interlinear glossing was recorded in a notebook.

1.7 Chapter Divide

Chapter 1: **The Biate Language and Community**

This Chapter provides information about the Biate community and its origin. This Chapter also provides a phonological and morphological overview of Biate followed by the review of the existing literature of the language.

Chapter 2: **Finite Clause in Biate Language**

In this chapter I have looked into the finite clauses in Biate. Tense-Aspect-Mood (TAM) and agreement features are dealt with in details. Positive and negative sentences are examined to understand the phenomenon of agreement system in the language. In the last part of this chapter the case system of the language is explained.

Chapter 3: **Theoretical Framework: Minimalist Program**

The background of the Generative theories and sub theories related to Minimalist Program are discussed. I focus mainly on the rules and conditions that facilitate to analyse finiteness, case and agreement of Biate finite clauses.

Chapter 4: **Biate Clause Structure: A Minimalist Approach**

The Biate Clauses are analysed within a generative framework 'A Minimalist Program'. In this chapter we look into the case system of Biate within the minimalist framework.

Chapter 5: **Agreement in positive and negative sentences**

This Chapter deals with positive and negative clauses present in the language. In this chapter we have mainly looked at the dynamicity of the agreement which are related to Tense-Aspect-Mood.

Chapter 6: **Conclusion**

It gives a brief summary of the findings of the Biate finite clause.

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End Note

[1] A total of five field work was conducted by the research scholar from 2016-2018 in Mualdan and Fiangpui villages in Dima Hasao district.

[1] Halflong Hindi is spoken in the Dima Hasao district of Assam. It has the language code **ISO 639-3 none (mis)** and is classified as a Hindi based pidgin. This lingua franca developed from 1892 onwards when Britishers started laying the Lumding-Badarupur meter gauge railway track. From Barbora, M. (in press) 'Eco-Linguitics Scenario of Northeast India' in *Movement Through Time and Space: Ecology and Lingua Cultural Change in South and Southeast Asia'*

[1] For detail see Lalsim (2012).

[1] Is a traditional cloth worn by women from breasts to waist.

[1] Type of cloth extending from waist to just above the knee.

[1] The Centre of Endangered Languages (CFEL), Tezpur University, established in 2013, has documented lesser -known Tibeto-Burman languages of Assam, Manipur and Nagaland. These languages are Biate, Hrangkhol and Khelma from Assam, Purum and Onaeme from Manipur and Liangmai and Yimkhuing (erstwhile Yimchunger) from Nagaland. This projected was funded by UGC, New Delhi.

[1] The Field Assistants of CFEL, Tezpur University, namely. Raju Ram Boro,and Daimalu Brhama along with Monali Longmailai, conducted field work for the Biate language in Dima Hasao district of Assam from 2016 to 2018..