

PHONOLOGICAL SYSTEMS OF KHOIBU

Sagolsem Indrakumar Singh

ABSTRACT

The purpose of the present study is to describe some of the phonological systems of Khoibu, a Tibeto-Burman language of the Naga-Kuki sub-group of the Naga group, spoken mainly in Manipur. As studied in many other Tibeto-Burman languages, the study of the phonological system of Khoibu mainly focuses on Segmental and Suprasegmental. Segmental features include vowel phonemes, diphthongs and consonant phonemes. However, the study of suprasegmental includes only tone. Khoibu does not have juncture. The segments of Khoibu do not show any great phonologically conditioned variations.

Key words: Khoibu, Phonological systems, Uipo Tlou, Segmental & Supersegmental.

INTRODUCTION

Khoibu, locally called as 'Uipo Tlou' is a tribe of Manipur. The language spoken by this tribe is called as Khoibu language which is linguistically one of the Tibeto-Burman language families. The term Khoibu is derived from the version of Khoi, which means Bee, and Pu is derived from Akapu, which means Owner. Therefore, Khoibu means the people own bee, beehives and honey in the indigenous land of Khoibu territory. The particular selected language of study is the language spoken in Khangshim village under one of the hill districts namely, the Chandel District of Manipur. The people speaking Khoibu language inhabit not only in the district but also spread in different areas of the state and even also outside the state, that is, Half-long, Assam and some part of Dimapur, Nagaland.

Linguistically Khoibu belongs to Naga-Kuki sub-group of the Naga group (Griersion, 1903-1928). Shafer (1955, 1966) classified Khoibu under Maring unit of the Luhupa Branch of Burmic Division. According to Benedict (1972), they are under the Kuki-Naga group. However, Benedict (1972) classified Khoibu under the Tangkhul-Kuki type of transition to Naga of the Kuki-Naga (Kukish).

PHONOLOGY

Phonological system of Khoibu speech contains three major systems of sounds, viz, vowels, consonants and tones. There are 27 phonemes; 21 are consonants and 6 are vowels. Diphthongs are 6 in number. They are discussed below.

VOWELS

It is already mentioned that there are 6 vowels in Khoibu. They are shown in Figure 1 below.

Vowel phonemes are described in terms of the following criteria:

- a) the tongue acts as an articulator as front, central and back;
- b) the highest of the tongue as high, mid and low;
- c) the position of the lip as rounded and unrounded.

Fig.1. Chart of Vowel Phonemes

Front		Central		Back	
Rounded	Unrounded	Rounded	Unrounded	Rounded	Unrounded
	i		ə	u	
	e		a		

Articulatory description of the vowel phonemes are given below:

- i- High, front, unrounded vowel
- e- Mid, front, unrounded vowel
- ə- Mid, central, unrounded vowel
- a- Low, central, unrounded vowel
- u- High, back, rounded vowel
- o- Mid, back, rounded vowel

These six vowels are established on the basis of the following minimal pairs:

- i/e : tip 'cycle tip'
tep 'water drop'
- ə/a : kətəŋ 'big'
kətəŋ 'rare'
- o/u : boŋ 'cheek'
buŋ 'hill lock'

More minimal pairs are given below:

a/u	:	la	'song'
		lu	'head'
e/a	:	mælle	'tongue'
		mælla	'archery (arrow & bow)'
i/u	:	p ^h i	'cloth'
		p ^h u	'rice cooking vessel'
ə/o	:	səm	'hair'
		som	'ten (old form)'
		sən	'husband'
		son	'knife'
ə/u	:	əpu	'uncle'
		upu	'almirah'

DISTRIBUTION OF VOWELS

All the six vowels can occur initially, medially and finally. But initial occurrence of the phoneme /e/ is very rare comparing with the other remaining vowels. Their distributions are discussed below one by one.

Occurrence of /i/

Initial occurrence:

ini	'seven'
it ^h ət	'island'
ipnət	'bed'
ismiər	'photograph'

Medial occurrence:

cim	'house'
hiŋ	'firewood'
kət ^h iŋ	'close'
mit	'eye'

Final occurrence:

ni	'we'
hi	'blood'
əci	'horn'
kəmi	'dark'

Occurrence of /ə/*Initial occurrence:*

ətək	'flesh'
ədək	'below'
ənət	'curry'
əmə	'cockroach'
əppə	'elder'
əci	'horn'

Medial occurrence:

pət	'cotton'
kətəŋ	'big'
məlun	'heart'
məla	'arrow'
kəca	'eat'

Final occurrence:

əppə	'elder'
lukənə	'headache'
kəltə	'distance'
jekənə	'enemy'

Occurrence of /a/*Initial occurrence:*

asa	'wings'
aci	'corner'
arəŋ	'peacock'
amur	'beak'

Medial occurrence:

par	'flower'
kabu	'begging'
kəhəŋ	'change'
kate	'south'
taku	'nine'

Final occurrence:

ja	'animal'
məla	'arrow'
kəca	'eat'
kəsa	'heat'
səkwa	'iron'

Occurrence of /u/*Initial occurrence:*

uk	'belly'
un	'skin'
ug	'chest'

Medial occurrence:

sun	'garlic'
məlun	'heart'
kəput	'hole'
muk	'ink'

Final occurrence:

p ^h u	'pot'
məsu	'sugarcane'
taku	'nine'
lu	'head'

Occurrence of /o/*Initial occurrence:*

on	'money'
ol	'adam's apple'
onkətɔl	'debt'
oncijau	'currency notes'

Medial occurrence:

kɔŋ	'river'
bɔŋ	'cheek'
kəson	'teaching'
sɔmli	'forty'

Final occurrence:

ro	'bamboo'
so	'key'
p ^h o	'shield'
məut ^h oro	'banana flower'

Occurrence of /k/*Initial occurrence:*

e	'they'
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Medial occurrence:

sek	'hammer'
jeca	'deer'
setp ^h əu	'desert'
jet ^h əiom	'bear'

Final occurrence:

kate	'south'
pame	'fifth'
k ^h əne	'fox'
be	'bean'

DIPHTHONGS

From the point of view of their quality, vowel sounds are of two types- monophthong and diphthong. Monophthongs are pure vowels and diphthongs are gliding vowels. A vowel that does not change in quality may be called a monophthong and a vowel sound with a continually changing quality may be called a diphthong.

The following diphthongs are found in Khoibu.

/ui/:	jui	'water'
	ru	'cane'
	pəlui	'grass'
	kərui	'hide'
/oi/:	roitli	'air'
	woi	'to the left'
/əi/:	kərəi	'cold (illness)'
	rəməi	'cloud'
/ai/:	joŋt ^h əlai	'courtyard'
	rədai	'dew'
	kədai	'gently'

/ao/:	kəŋao	'fool'
	k ^h ao	'grasshopper'
/əu/:	kək ^h əu	'keep'
	kədəu	'fresh'
	cəuki	'chair'

CONSONANTS:

There are 21 consonant phonemes in Khoibu. Consonants are divided into stops, fricatives, nasals, laterals, trills and semi-vowels respectively. It is on the basis of the manner of articulation. Again all these consonants are divided into aspirated and unaspirated on one hand and voice and voiceless on the other hand. Of the 21 consonant phonemes, 12 are stops. 4 stops such as /p, t, k, c/ are voiceless and unaspirated. While the other phonemes such as /p^h, t^h, k^h/ are voiceless aspirated. Phonemes such as /b, d, g/ are voiced unaspirated stops while phonemes /d^h, g^h/ are voiced aspirated.

There are two fricatives /s, h/, three nasals /m, n, ŋ/, one lateral /l/, one trill /r/ and two semi-vowels /w, y/ respectively.

Classification of consonant according to the place of articulation

- i) **p, p^h, b, m, w**, are bilabial
- ii) **p, t, k, c**, are voiceless unaspirated stops
- iii) **b, d, g**, are unaspirated stops
- iv) **p^h, t^h, k^h** are voiceless aspirated stops
- v) **d^h, g^h** are voiced aspirated stops
- vi) **m, n, ŋ**, are respectively bilabial and alveolar nasals
- vii) **l** is only alveolar lateral
- viii) **h** is glottal fricatives
- ix) **r** is alveolar trill
- x) **w** and **j** are respectively bilabial and palatal semi-vowels

Place of Articulation

		Labia	Alveola	Palata	Velar	Glottal
		l	r	l		
Stops	Voiceless Unaspirated	p	t	c	k	
	Voiceless Aspirate	p ^h	t ^h		k ^h	
	Voiced Unaspirated	b	d		g	
	Voice Aspirated		d ^h		g ^h	
	Fricatives			s		h
Nasals		m	n		ŋ	
Lateral			l			
Trill (Flap)			r			
Semi-Vowels		w		y		

Table for Consonant Phonemes

DISTRIBUTION OF CONSONANTS

All the consonants except [d^h] can occur in initial as well as in the intervocalic positions in a word. The following table shows occurrences of the consonant phonemes.

Consonan	Initial occurrence		Medial occurrence		Final occurrence	
t	+	puipai	+	səpuk	+	dop
p	+	təŋla	+	kətar	+	ciptəcət
c	+	cim	+	məcihəi	-	
k	+	kəhəŋ	+	Pako	+	tilhəukuk
p ^h	+	p ^h o	+	p ^h uncuokəp ^h e ŋ	-	

t ^h	+	t ^h ələi	+	p ^h akət ^h ot	-	
k ^h	+	k ^h əmən	+	pun ^h k ^h əira	-	
b	+	bon	+	kəbom	+	cəicib
d	+	dop	+	k ^h udpui	+	k ^h əd
g	+	gəm	+	həigənə	+	seg
d ^h	-		+	gad ^h a	-	
g ^h	+	g ^h o	-		-	
s	+	suŋ	+	həlson	+	brəs
h	+	halpa	+	məihən	-	
n	+	nomsom	+	mənə	+	nəyum
m	+	mot ^h əi	+	hompui	+	məibom
ŋ	+	ŋi	+	nəŋak	+	lək ^h aŋ
l	+	lailik	+	ralbom	+	rimpal
r	+	rog	+	jərəm	+	wanpar
w	+	wapa	+	jəwn	+	jau
y	+	ya	+	wajui	+	maj

CONSONANT SEQUENCE

When two or more consonants are occurred in an immediate position beyond the syllable it is regarded as consonant sequence. In Khoibu a number of consonants can have immediate occurrence as given in the following examples.

m can occur with *b*, *g* and *p*

m+b	cim-bara	'rent'
m+g	bom-gələu	'rest'
m+p	bom-pui	'kitchen'

k can occur with *n*, *c* and *s*

k+n	nikni	'day after tomorrow'
k+c	cekcil	'care'
k+s	caksəŋ	'kitchen'

l can have an immediate occurrence with *h* & *p*

<i>l+h</i>	tilhəukulk	'onion'
<i>l+p</i>	dinel-pui	'a kind of cricket'

ŋ can occur with *d* & *k*

<i>ŋ+d</i>	bun-don	'mountain peak'
<i>ŋ+k</i>	bun-kri	'first'

r: can occur with *b*, *s* and *c*

<i>r+b</i>	dar-ban	'traditional scarf'
<i>r+s</i>	dar-sui	'deltoid'
<i>r+c</i>	dar-ca	'father's eldest sister'

n: can occur with *j* and *k*

<i>n+j</i>	bun-jəu	'hut'
<i>n+k</i>	ban-ki	'ring'

There are a few words they can occur with other consonants as follows.

<i>p+t</i>	cip-təcət	'eighty'
<i>t+n</i>	tut-nut	'last'
<i>t^h+l</i>	cip ^h -əik ^h ət	'eleven'

CONSONANT CULTURE

The consonant clusters in Khoibu are the occurrences of two consonants within a syllable in initial positions. The first members of such cluster will be one of the five phonemes /p, t, t^h, b and l/ and the phonemes /j, r, l and h/. The examples of cluster are very limited as occurring as the initial cluster or the medial cluster but not final cluster in the following.

Clusters that occur in initial position of a word are as follows:

a) Stop + Glide (Semi-Vowels)

<i>p + j</i>	>	pjɛŋlul	'trumpet'
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b) Stop + Trill

t + r	>	trim	'needle'
		tran	'mosquito'
		trulmæi	'widow'
t ^h + r	>	t ^h rələuləicin	'library'

c) Stop + Lateral

t ^h + l	>	t ^h lɛŋ	'always'
		t ^h ləu	'duty'
		t ^h ləimai	'floor'
		t ^h lan	'grave'

d) Stop + Trill

b + r	>	brəs	'brush'
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e) Lateral + Glottal

l + h	>	lhəŋai	'beauty'
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Clusters that occur in medial position of a syllable are as followed:

a) Stop + Lateral

t + l	>	kərtləŋ	'groom'
		kətləp	'slow'

b) Stop + Tril

t + r	>	hiŋtrjɛg	'sapling'
t ^h + r	>	kəut ^h rel	'vibrate'
k + r	>	bəŋkri	'first'
b + r	>	rəwbral	'chest to middle finger'

c) Tril + Glide/Semi vowels

t + j > somrjed 'seventy'

TONE

Khoibu has three tones namely, level, falling and rising. Level tone is not marked while rising and falling are marked as (/) and (\) respectively.

The following tables show tonal contrast in monosyllabic and disyllabic features in Khoibu.

Monosyllabic tonal contrast:

Level	Gloss	Falling	Gloss	Rising	Gloss
-	-	`ai	crab	a'i	wild animal
ca	paddy	`ca	tea	c'a	my child
caŋ	kitchen selves	`caŋ	strength/capability	c'aŋ	trap
la	fragment of yarn	`la	small piece	la'	song
-	-	l`əm	arm stretch	lə'm	road
-	-	l`əu	medicinal wood	lə'u	field
-	-	n`a	baby younger sibling	n'a	leaf
paŋ	dinning table made of cane or bamboo	p`aŋ	company	pa'aŋ	prize
-	-	j`a	loom	ja'	animal
-	-	s`əm	dress	sə'm	hair
-	-	w`a	fowl	wa'	axe

Disyllabic tonal contrast:

Level	Gloss	Falling	Gloss	Rising	Gloss
əbəŋ	amniotic fluid of the new born baby	-	-	əbə'aŋ	front
-	-	əh`əu	sound	əhə'u	outside
ələl	one's treasure	-	-	ələl'	muscle fiber

əpa	elder	əp`a	male or father	-	-
əpal	rent	-	-	əpa`l	nearby
-	-	əs`an	first half of the lunar month	əsa`n	one's husband
kəhəi	a wild chesewnut plant	kəh`əi	report	kəhə`i	to bear
kəhər	difficult	kəh`ər	to play	-	-
kərən	to stop quarreling	kər`ən	disperse or spacious	kərə`n	to stop wild fire
kərəu	behaviour	kərə`u	to roast	-	-
kəroi	to remove	-	-	kəroi	to carry or to lead
kətəm	to do something	-	-	kətə`m	circular shape

JUNCTURE

Juncture is not found in Khoibu language. It can be assumed that there is no juncture in Khoibu language.

CONCLUSION

It is concluded that vowels in Khoibu can occur in three positions- initial, medial and final. Minimal vowel contrasts are shown with examples. Distributionally the vowel phoneme /e/ is very rare comparing with other remaining vowels. Diphthongs are very clear in 6 numbers. Occurrence of consonant clusters in final position is not found. Three tones are found and marked as level, falling (\\) and rising (/). Level tone is unmarked. These tones are discussed in monosyllabic and disyllabic tonal contrasts. There is no juncture in Khoibu language.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Sagolsem Indrakumar Singh has a PhD in Linguistics, having researched the topic "Manipuri Clause Structure" at Manipur University, Canchipur, Imphal. His publications include topics in typology, syntax, morphosyntax, etc. in the Tibeto-Burman area.