Syllable Structure of Totok Chingkho

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ABSTRACT

This research presents a phonological description of Totok Chingkho. The aim is to construct a phonemic and vocalic inventory of the language, as well as look into the syllable structure. The main objective of this research is to provide a phonological basis for further research in this language. Field methodology was used during data collection for this project. A word list of approximately 413 words was constructed and translated to Totok Chingkho by a native speaker. The translated words were transcribed using the IPA system, and were analyzed manually. The phonemic and vocalic inventory were created from minimal pairs extracted from the word-list. To determine the syllable structure, words were divided according to the number of syllables and their onset-nucleus, nucleus-coda relationship was investigated. There is a possibility for further research in phonological system as well as suprasegmental phonology of Totok Chingkho. Certain anomalies were observed, such as, the presence of labial stops and nasal sounds but absence of a labial fricative sound. Similarly, diphthongs were observed but not all could be confirmed. The data for onset-nucleus-coda relationship was found to be irregular which needs more explanation. This study provides requisite groundwork for further research in various facets of Totok Chingkho.

Keywords

Syllable Structure, Totok Chingkho, Phonology, Syllable Structure

1. INTRODUCTION

The classification of Tibeto-Burman languages has received some amount of attention in the past from researchers. Grierson (1901), Robbins (1998), Benedict. Burling (2003) has classified Konyak (Tableng) as belonging to the Konyak branch of the Bodo-Konyak-Jinghpaw sub-group under the central area in the Tibeto-Burman language family as illustrated in Figure 1(a).

Konyak is described by Grierson as the Angwangku or Tableng tribe [Linguistic Survey of India (1903, vol.3)]. The language is classified under the Eastern- Naga branch of the Naga sub-group of the Tibeto-Burman languages. The dialect under study is Totok Chingkho which is spoken in the Lower Mon area in the Mon district of North-East Nagaland. The region inhabited by the Konyak tribe is visualized in Figure 1(b).

Totok is one of the dialects out of 24 dialects of Konyak. Wakching is the standard dialect of Konyak. Totok has 7 more sub-dialects namely Chingnyu, Chingkho, Chingha, Chinglen, Lapa, Longphau, Phuktong. The sub-dialect

under study is Chingkho. In this work, a preliminary study on the phonetics and phonology of previously undocumented Totok Chingkho dialect is performed. The sound system and syllable structure in particular are studied and documented in this research project.

Figure. 1(a) The classification of Konyak Language. Figure 1(b) Language Map of North-East India

2. METHODOLOGY

The data was collected with the help of a native speaker of Totok Chingkho. A list of 413 words from the Swadesh list as well as personal contribution was used. For elicitation, the informant was asked to translate the wordlist into Totok Chingkho. Minimal pairs were extracted from the collected data set and were used to determine the phonology of Totok Chingkho. Later the words were organized according to the number of syllables observed then the onset-nucleus and nucleus-coda relationship were determined.

3. PHONOLOGY

The study of the sound system of Totok Chingkho revealed the presence of 17 consonants, 6 vowel phonemes and 2 diphthongs. No vowel length contrast, consonant cluster or geminate consonant were observed. /ʃ/ was seen to occur in free variation with /s/.

Table 1: Vowel Phonemes

	Front	Central	Back
Close	i		u
Mid	e	ə	o
Open		a	

Table 2: Consonant Phonemes

		Bilabial	Dental	Alveolar	Postalveolar	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Plosive	Unaspirated	p	t				k	ʔ
	Aspirated	p ^h	t ^h				k ^h	
Affricate				tʃ				
Nasal		m		n		ɲ	ŋ	
Fricative				s	ʃ			h
Approximant		w				j		
Lateral				l				

The vocalic inventory of Totok Chingkho is shown in Table 1. Additionally, the two diphthongs found to exist in Totok Chingkho are /eə/ and /ea/. The distribution of Totok Chingkho consonant phonemes is shown in Table 2. No evidence of voiced plosives was observed and only one voiced approximant /l/ was found.

4. SYLLABLE STRUCTURE

Burling (2003. Ch. 11) describes syllable in a Tibeto-Burman language as a crucial phonological unit. Matisoff (2003) talked about Tibeto-Burman syllable as “consisting of the following structural elements: an onset comprising a root initial consonant (Ci), preceded by up to two consonantal prefixes (P2, P1), and optionally followed by a liquids or semi vowel glide (G); and a vocalic nucleus consisting minimally of a simple vowel, followed optionally by a restricted set of possible final consonants (Cf) and/or a suffix (S).”

Table 3: Six possible syllable structures in Totok Chingkho

Lexical Item	Gloss	Syllable Type
/u/	who	V
/u/	bird	VV
/an/	snacks	VC
/si/	mango	CV
/him/	salt	CVC
/mi/	meat	CVV

A basic syllable structure in Totok Chingkho can be seen in Figure 2(a). The study shows that there are six possible syllable structure in Totok Chingkho as shown in Table 3.

Figure 2: Basic Syllable Structure

5. OPEN AND CLOSED SYLLABLES

5.1 Open Syllables

Open syllables in Totok Chingkho can be filled by either monophthongs or diphthongs as shown in Table 4. The occurrence of mid vowel /ə/ was not observed.

5.2 Closed Syllables

The coda position of a closed syllable in Totok Chingkho can be taken by unaspirated stops or by nasals as shown in Table 5. Nasals occur more frequently in the word final position, especially the voiced alveolar nasal /n/.

Table 4: Open Syllables in Totok Chingkho

Lexical item	Gloss
/na/	ear
/le/	tongue
p ^h au	forest

Table 5: Closed Syllables in Totok Chingkho

Lexical item	Gloss	Lexical item	Gloss
ŋəʔ	bamboo	jok	six
səp	cry	kaʔ	talk
won	vegetable	ham	yawn
pən	tea	soŋ	stream

5.3 Distribution of Consonants in the Onset and Coda Positions

In a basic CVC structure, all consonants mentioned in figure 1 occur at the coda position with central vowels /ə/ and /a/ except glottal stop /ʔ/. Additionally, all consonants except /n/ and /w/ occur at the coda position with front-mid vowel /e/ except nasals. /i/ was not seen to have any fixed patterns. It did not occur with /p^h/, /ŋ/ and /w/. Stop /k/ and nasal /n/, /ŋ/ occur at the coda position after all the six vowels. /m/ occurs only after mid vowels /ə/ and /o/. it was also seen that /ʔ/ occurs mostly after /i/ when there is a /h/ in the onset.

Figure 3(a): Monosyllabic Word Structure(top-left) Figure 3(b): Disyllabic Word Structure (top-right). Figure 3(c): Trisyllabic Word Structure (bottom)

6. TOTOK WORD STRUCTURE

The study of word structure of Totok Chingkho revealed three types of structures, namely, monosyllabic, disyllabic and trisyllabic. The following subsections provide illustrations and examples of the word structures mentioned above.

6.1 Monosyllabic words

Figure 2(b) illustrates a CVC monosyllabic word. As the name suggests, monosyllabic words are words containing a single syllable. The analysis of the syllable structure of monosyllabic words in Totok Chingkho revealed the structures shown in Table 6. It is observed that CV and CVC structures occur most frequently in Totok monosyllabic words.

Table 6: Syllable Structure of Monosyllabic Words

6.2 Disyllabic words

Disyllabic words are words with two syllables. During the analysis of Totok Chingkho, disyllabic word structure was found to be the most commonly occurring structure. The various syllable structures observed in disyllabic words are shown in Table 7.

Table 7: Syllable Structures of Disyllabic Words

Syllable type	Lexical item	Gloss
CVC.CVC	k ^h əl.jep	tea leaf

CVC.CVC	k ^h əŋ.pak	head dresses
CVC.VC	tin.oŋ	marriage
CV.CV	ko.we	orange
CV.CV	pu.ka	beetle nut
CVC.CV	sot.pu	sit
CVC.CV	jip.pu	sleep
VC.CV	aŋ.ja	queen
VC.CV	an.ba	king
CV.CVC	ŋeu.moŋ	banana flower
CV.CVC	mai.loŋ	pumpkin
V.CV	au.ho	egg
V.CV	au.məi	chicken

6.3 Trisyllabic words

Trisyllabic words are words with three syllables. During this study, it was found that this word structure exists sparsely in Totok Chingkho. Table 8 shows the different syllable structures observed for trisyllabic words in this language. CV and CVC were found to be common structures observed in Totok trisyllabic words.

Table 8: Syllable Structures of Trisyllabic Words

Syllable type	Lexical item	Gloss
CVC.CVC.CV	k ^h əl.jep.k ^h a	black tea
CVC.CVC.CV	jak.kun.ju	feather
CV.CV.CVC	su.he.jaŋ	chili
V.CV.CVC	au.he.jaŋ	lemon
CV.CV.CV	mai.hu.məi	beef

7. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In this work, 17 consonants, 6 vowel phonemes and 2 diphthongs were found. Stops occur at 4 places of articulation: bilabial, dental, velar and glottal. The voiceless bilabial, dental and velar stops are in contrast with their aspirated counterparts. There are 6 monophthongs and 2 diphthongs and there is no vowel length distinction.

Totok Chingkho is found to have an obligatory syllable type V. An optional second vowel after the obligatory vowel V (V) can be attached as seen in /əu/ 'bird'. An open syllable can be filled by either monophthongs or diphthongs. Unaspirated stops /p, t, k/ or nasals /m, n, ŋ/ may take the coda position of a syllable. There are three possible word structures in Totok Chingkho: monosyllable, disyllable and trisyllable. Disyllabic structure of words was

Syllable type	Lexical item	Gloss
V	u	who
V	e	read
VV	əu	bird
CV	wao	squash
CV	ŋəu	banana
VC	an	snacks
CVC	ŋət	bamboo
CVC	him	salt
CVV	məi	meat

observed to be most frequent with various word formations.

In conclusion, this preliminary study of phonetics and phonology of Totok Chingkho takes a step towards documentation of the previously undocumented language.

8. REFERENCES

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