

Phonological Typology of Manipuri

^[1] O Harimani Singha

^[1] Research scholar, Assam University, India

^[1] harimaniinam@gmail.com

Abstract: - The present paper is an attempt to explore and address the typological features of Manipuri in the domain of phonology and briefly describes the typological features of Manipuri in the domain of phonology and also examines how far Manipuri conforms to the typologically similar features of Tibeto-Burman languages under the following parameters. Manipuri, locally known as Meiteilon, is one of the oldest and advanced Tibeto-Burman languages of the Northeast India (Grierson, 1903). Manipuri language spoken predominantly in Manipur, a northeastern state of India. Smaller speech communities exist in the Indian states of Assam, Mizoram, and Tripura, as well as in Bangladesh and Myanmar (Burma). It is the only medium of communication among different tribes of Manipur.

Index Terms: Vocalic phonemes, consonantal phonemes, vowel and consonant cluster formation

INTRODUCTION

This paper deals with the typological features of Manipuri in phonology. In classification of most common pattern to all of the languages of Tibeto-Burman family Manipuri has six vowels and doesn't have nasalised Vowels[1]. Voiced aspirated stops are the common features in Manipuri language like others TB language[2]. The another typological features of TB languages found in Manipur are having nasal sounds and continuants and absence of glottalisation[3][4]. As a tonal language Manipuri shows two way tone 'level' and 'high'. Like other Tibeto-Burman languages Manipuri have vowel and consonant Clusters.

Vocalic Phonemes

Classification

Manipuri six vocalic phonemes consisting of five peripheral /i, e, a, o, u/ and one interior /ə/ vowels. According to their tongue height, they can be classified into three levels: high, mid and low. Manipuri being a Tibeto-Burman language does follow the typological pattern of the Tibeto-Burman languages, i.e., the classification of vowels at the three levels, viz., high, mid and low, is the most common pattern to almost all of the languages of the family[5].

Nasalised Vowels

All vocalic phonemes of Manipuri are oral, i.e., Manipuri doesn't have nasalised vowels[6]. The absence of nasalised vowels is one of the typological features of Tibeto-Burman languages shared by Manipuri[7].

Length Contrast

Like many other Tibeto-Burman languages, Manipuri vocalic Phonemes do not show the length contrast: long vs.

short, i.e., length is not phonemic in the case of Manipuri vowels. This is also another typological feature of Tibeto-Burman languages exhibited by Manipuri.

Consonantal Phonemes

Stops

In Manipuri, there are four voiceless unaspirated stops /p, t, c, k/ which are syllable or word initially and there are also four voiced unaspirated stops /b, d, j, g/ which lack aspiration and The aspirated voiceless stops are /ph, th, kh/ and the aspirated voiced stops are /bh, dh, jh, gh/ unreleased in syllable or word final position while their unaspirated voiced counterparts are always released, and never occur in syllable or word final position[8]. Thus the presence of three series of stops and absence of voiced aspirated stops are the most common features of Tibeto-Burman languages shared by Manipuri[9].

Nasals

Manipuri has three nasal sounds, viz., /m, n, ŋ/ Among them, there is a high frequency of the occurrence of velar nasal /ŋ/ however, it never occurs in syllable or word initial position[10]. It is to be noticed that all three nasal sounds can occur in three position like initial, middle and final position Thus, it is another typological feature of Tibeto-Burman languages found in Manipuri[11].

Continuants

Like many other Tibeto-Burman languages, Manipuri has mainly five continuant sounds /s, z, r, l, h/. But the occurrence of alveolar fricatives /s, z/ and glottal fricative /h/ in the syllable or word final position is totally missing in the language except in some of the Indo-Aryan loanwords, as in

des 'country', razthani 'palace', namoh 'pray' etc[12].

Glottalisation

The presence or absence of glottalisation is one of the major issues of the Tibeto-Burman language family[13]. So, Manipuri lacks glottalization. Thus the absence of glottalisation is one of the typological features of Manipuri in the above sub-group of languages[14].

Tone

One of the prominent typological features of Tibeto-Burman languages is that most of the languages are tonal except some Tibetan languages, Manipuri being a Tibeto - Burman language thus conforms to the typological feature of the family that Manipuri shows two tone contrast :level vs. falling Tone plays a significant role in this language i.e. by changing the Pitch of tone. the same word which indicates a different in meaning as an ice ,un skin

Voicing

Voicing is not the relevant feature in the case of Manipuri vowels,i.e., Manipuri doesn't have voiceless vowels. But it is one of the relevant features in case of consonantal phonemes, i.e., Manipuri shows the voiced voiceless contrast of obstruent sounds like p vs.b, t vs.d. k vs.g , and s vs. z.

The lack of voiceless vowels and presence of voiced-voiceless contrast of certain classes of consonantal phonemes are the typological features exhibited by most of the Tibeto-Burman languages[15]. Thus, Manipuri exhibits the typologically similar features.

Aspiration

Most of the South Asian languages in general and Tibeto-Burman languages in particular are unique among the world's languages in having contrast between aspirated and unaspirated plosives both voiced and voiceless. Manipuri being a Tibeto-Burman language shows contrast between the unaspirated voiceless plosives and aspirated voiceless plosives[16]. Manipuri, Purum, Thadou, Vaiphai languages does follow the typologically similar feature, i.e., Manipuri makes contrast between p vs. ph, t vs. th and k vs kh

Cluster Formation

Vowel Clusters

Unlike other Tibeto-Burman languages, Manipuri doesn't have vowel clusters. There are some TB languages like Mishing Karbi, Lotha, Hmar etc. which have vowel clusters. Thus Manipuri doesn't exhibit the typologically similar feature of the family.

Consonant Clusters

Generally Manipuri consonant clusters are syllable initially, in which the first members of the clusters are mainly

obstruents while the second members are liquids. No consonant cluster is allowed syllable finally. The presence of initial clusters and absence of final clusters are typologically marked features of most of the Tibeto-Burman languages . Manipuri thus conforms to the similar features of the family.

Syllabicity

Predominance of monosyllabic words is one of the prominent typological features of Tibeto-Burman languages, i.e., the majority of all words in Tibeto-Burman languages are of single syllable. Thus Manipuri conforms to the similar feature of the family, i.e., Manipuri roots are generally monosyllabic; few disyllabic roots are also found in the language as in əŋaŋ chld , əhən elder .

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