

Vowels Of The Tai Khamti Language

Pankajyoti Borah

Abstract: Tai Khamti is a unique language of North-East with unique characteristics in Phonetics, Morphology, Syntax etc. It is a tonal language. Phone or sound is a fundamental element of Language. It is an important area of linguistics. Two types of Segmental sounds are- Vowel and Consonant sounds. The sounds which are produced without any obstruction or stricture in the vocal tract, it is known as vowel. So, as a tonal language the vowels play a vital role in the Tai Khamti language. Tai Khamti language is in endangered level; gradually the speakers of Khamti language have been decreased so an attempt has been chosen to highlight the Vowels of the Khamti language. In this paper the phonetic descriptions like: classification of vowel, vowel cluster, quality and use of vowel and vowel cluster have been chosen for study.

Index Terms: Phoneme, Vowel, Contrasts, Cluster, vowel quality, Tai Khamti

1 INTRODUCTION

North-East India is a fascinating land of different language families, like: Sino-Tibetan, Austic, Indo-European, Dravidian etc. The Tibeto-Burman and Thai-Chin languages from Sino-Tibetan family are also found in North-East India. The Thai-Chin languages are found only in North-East India. The Tai languages that are found in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh are-Tai Khamti, Tai Aiton, Tai Phake, Tai Turung, Tai Khayang and Tai Ahom (Borah : 5). Among these languages the Tai Khamti language has a few speakers which led a threat for the preservation of the language. Therefore scientific and systematic study is more important for the development of the language. In this prospect 'Vowel of the Khamti language' has been chosen for study. Through this topic I have tried to imply an attempt in systematic study of the language. Tai Khamti is a unique language with unique characteristics in Phonetics, Morphology, Syntax etc. It is a tonal language. So, as a tonal language the vowels play a vital role in the language. Phone or speech sound is a fundamental element of Language. It is an important area of linguistics. Two types of Segmental sounds are-Vowel and Consonant sounds. The sounds which are produced without any obstruction or stricture in the vocal tract, it is known as vowel. Vowel sounds are produced through open configuration. On the contrary consonant sounds are produced through full of obstruction in the vocal tract. The vowel sounds are produced by the articulation of tongue and lip. The Vowel sounds are contrasted with each other in terms of auditory quality or characteristics. This article will be dealt with the phonology or vowel of the Tai Khamti language.

1.1 Objectives of Study

- To give an introduction of the colloquial vowel of the Khamti language.
- To analyze the vowel quality, vowel contrasts and cluster through vowel analysis of the Tai Khamti language.

1.2 Methods of study

For this paper different types of Data collection and data analysis methods are chosen.

For data collection interview and observation methods have been adopted. In interview method data have been collected through recording. Sony Stereo Recorder ICD-UX560F is used as tools for data collection (male 4100 Hz and female 2200 Hz). The sounds or speech are kept in recording, the sounds have been taken through sincere observation and verification. For data analysis descriptive and analytical methods have been adopted.

2 CLASSIFICATIONS OF VOWELS IN THE KHAMTI LANGUAGE

Seven vowels are found in Khamti language. These are- /i, e, ə, a, ɔ, o, u/. Among these seven have long forms. These vowels are- /i:, e:, ə:, a:, ɔ:, o:, u:/. These vowels can be categorized in terms of the vowel height, length and nature of lip.

Front and Back of vowel:

Front:	/i, e /
Central:	/ə, a /
Back:	/ɔ, o, u /

Height of vowel:

Close:	/i, u /
Close-mid:	/e, o /
Mid:	/ə /
Open-mid:	/ɔ /
Open:	/a /

Lip of vowel:

Rounded:	/i, e, ə, a /
Unrounded:	/ɔ, o, u /

Length of vowel:

Short vowel:	/i, e, ə, a, ɔ, o, u /
Long vowel:	/i:, e:, ə:, a:, ɔ:, o:, u: /

For the Convenience of phonemic inventory of the Khamti vowels. Based on the data, the following table is prepared. This table listed the short and long vowel phonemes which are found in the Khamti language.

• Pankajyoti Borah Research Scholar, Dept. of Assamese Dibrugarh University, Assam, India Email- pankajborah554@gmail.com

Table. 2 The Khamti vowel phonemes.

Lip	Rounded				Unrounded	
	Front		Central		Back	
	s. v.	l. v.	s. v.	l. v.	s. v.	l. v.
Close	i	i:			u	u:
Close-mid	e	e:			o	o:
Mid			ə	ə:		
Open-mid					ɔ	ɔ:
Open			a	a:		

The Table 2 shows that khmati has seven (7) phonetically distinctive short vowel phonemes - / i, e, ə, a, ɔ, o, u / and seven (7) phonologically distinctive long vowel phonemes- /i:, e:, ə:, a:, ɔ:, o:, u: /.

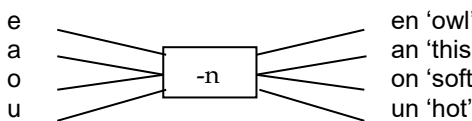
3 CONTRASTS IN THE KHAMTI LANGUAGE

Vowel sounds are contrasted in initial, medial or final position in terms of identical or analogous environment. Phonemes are determined through contrasts analysis of sounds in phonemics. The following vowels of the Khamti language can be determined through contrasts analysis-

3.1 Initial Contrasts of the vowel:

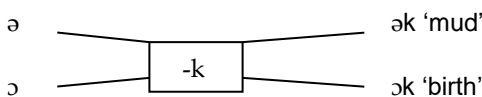
Identical environment: [- n]

Phoneme: / i, e, a, o, u /



Identical environment: [- k]

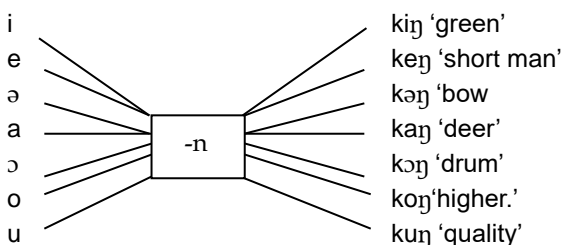
Phoneme: / ə, ɔ /



3.2 Medial Contrasts of the vowel:

Identical environment: [k - ŋ]

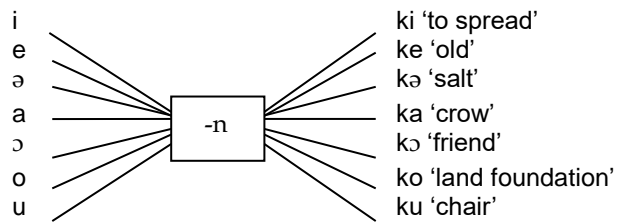
Phoneme: / i, e, ə, a, ɔ, o, u /



3.3 Final Contrasts of the vowel:

Identical environment: [k -]

Phoneme: / i, e, ə, a, ɔ, o, u /



The above Khamti vowels / i, e, ə, a, ɔ, o, u / in initial, medial and final position are ascertained as phoneme through phonetic contrasts in identical environment.

3 VOWEL QUALITY AND IT'S USES

The sound which is produced without any obstruction in the vocal tract is known as vowel. The vowels of Tai Khamti language are fully Obstruent and non-fricative. An illustration of vowel quality can be illustrated with examples as follows-

/i/ : It is a close front, unrounded vowel. This vowel is used in initial, middle and final position of a word or a syllable, [IPA No-301]. For example:

Initial		Middle		Final	
word	gloss	word	gloss	word	gloss
inu	love	nij	tea	ai	brass
i:	2 nd daughter	tin	foot	ki	good

Table.4(a) Example of the occurrence of phoneme /i/.

/e/ : It is a close-mid front, unrounded vowel. This vowel is used in initial, middle and final position of a word or a syllable, [IPA No-302]. For example:

Initial		Middle		Final	
word	gloss	word	gloss	word	gloss
en	owl	teŋ		namse	milk
eŋ	a pitcher	kep	a bamboo lath	se:	paper

Table.4(b) Example of the occurrence of phoneme /e/.

/ə/ : It is a mid central, unrounded vowel. This vowel is used in initial, middle and final position of a word or a syllable, [IPA No-322]. For example:

Initial		Middle		Final	
word	gloss	word	gloss	word	gloss

a:	wonderment	[^s əp	mouth	nə	meat
-	-	nət	chin	kə	salt

Table.4(c) Example of the occurrence of phoneme /ə/.

/a/ : It is a open front, unrounded vowel. This vowel is used in initial, middle and final position of a word or a syllable, [IPA No-304]. For example-

Initial		Middle		Final	
word	gloss	word	gloss	word	gloss
an	one	van	sun	ka	crow
au	take	kao	l	ma	horse

Table.4(d) Example of the occurrence of phoneme /a/.

SL	Cluster	Word	Gloss
1	/iu/	ten-liu	cotton tree
2	/ei/	peit	duck
3	/ee/	me:en	Porcupine
4	/ea/	mea:	aunt
5	/eu/	meu	Cat
6	/æ/	mai-næk	bamboo pole
7	/aa/	laa:	dumb
8	/ao/	lao	Wine
9	/au/	sau	Father
10	/ɔi/	ɔi	sugarcane
11	/ui/	kuj	Cotton

/ɔ/ : It is a open mid back, rounded vowel. This vowel is used in initial, middle and final position of a word or a syllable, [IPA No-306]. For example:

Initial		Middle		Final	
word	gloss	word	gloss	word	gloss
ɔn	small	sɔm	mongoose	hɔ	boat
ɔi	sugarcane	hɔj	a pond	k ^h ɔ	laugh

Table.4(e) Example of the occurrence of phoneme /ɔ/.

/o/ : It is a close-mid back, rounded vowel. This vowel is used in initial, middle and final position of a word or a syllable, [IPA No-307]. For example:

Initial		Middle		Final	
word	gloss	word	gloss	word	gloss
on	soft	nok	bird	lao	wine
o:		[^s op	Beak of	mao	Thin

			a bird		
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Table.4(f) Example of the occurrence of phoneme /o/.

/u/ : It is a close back, rounded vowel. This vowel is used in initial, middle and final position of a word or a syllable, [IPA No-308]. For example:

Initial		Middle		Final	
word	gloss	word	gloss	word	gloss
un	hot	kui	cotton	ku	chair
u:	stay	kun	man	hu	ear

Table.4(g) Example of the occurrence of phoneme /u/.

/ i, e, ə, a, ɔ, o, u / all vowels of the Khamti language are used in initial, middle and final position of a word.

5 VOWEL CLUSTER

Vowel Cluster is a combination of different vowels. It is combination of one or two vowels. These combinations may be two or three vowels. In Khamti language two vowels clusters like— / iu, ei, ee, ea, eu, əe, aa, ao, au, ɔi/ and /ui / are found. These vowel clusters can be figured as follows.

	i	e	ə	a	ɔ	o	u
i							1
e	2	3		4			5
ə		6					
a				7		8	9
ɔ	10						
o							
u	11						

Table.5(a) The Khamti vowel Cluster.

Table.5(b) The Khamti vowel Cluster word.

6 CONCLUSION

Through this discussion we found some findings as follows-

- Seven (7) vowels are found in Khamti language. These are- / i, e, ə, a, ɔ, o, u / . Each vowel has a long form.
- At present study the uses of vowel /ə / is significant in the Khamti language. It is found in Central-mid position of a word.
- In Khamti language eleven (11) types of two vowels cluster are found. These clusters found only in the final position.

The Khamti language is in endangered level. Systematic research is required for its development and preservation. Globalization has left a bad impact on this tribe's language-literature-culture so that the new generations have lack of

sincerity about their language. If systematic study or research does not take in time, one day definitely it will lose its root.

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