# Words and Beyond

## A Multidisciplinary Exploration of Northeast Indian Languages

Department of Linguistics

TETSO COLLEGE®
STRIVE FOR EXCELLENCE

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**Words and Beyond: A Multidisciplinary Exploration of Northeast Indian Languages**

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Editors

## Foreword

The field of Linguistics which is 'a scientific study of language' is on a gradual rise with more colleges and universities introducing it as a major discipline of study throughout Northeast India. One such institution to introduce Linguistics to the Bachelor's Degree Programme is Tetso College. Located in Dimapur, Nagaland, the Department of Linguistics is run by four teachers specializing in different branches of Linguistics. In its effort to explore and describe the rich ethnolinguistic diversity of Northeast India, the Department of Linguistics, Tetso College has produced an e-book on a wide range of topics: phonology, morphosyntax, multilingualism, language documentation, ritual language, among others, in a wide range of languages, mainly from the Tibeto-Burman family. The topics selected in the e-book cover the structural and interdisciplinary aspects of the language from different languages of the region. This e-book will supplement the knowledge of language and its relation to other related disciplines.

I congratulate the team of teachers of Tetso College for their initiative in bringing out the e-book *Words and Beyond: A Multidisciplinary Exploration of Northeast Indian Languages* and wish them the best of success in their endeavour to explore and describe the languages of Northeast India which remained largely unexplored and underdocumented.

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## Preface

*Words and Beyond: A Multidisciplinary Exploration of Northeast Indian Languages* is an initiative by the Department of Linguistics, Tetso College (affiliated to Nagaland University), aimed at highlighting our academic research and scholarly contributions. The department is the first and one of the few in the region to offer an undergraduate degree in Linguistics.

This ebook, ranging from phonology and morphology to sociolinguistic aspects is the culmination of the collective efforts of scholars and researchers who have meticulously explored a diverse range of linguistic topics, with a special focus on the languages of Northeast India. The linguistic landscape of this region deserves more scholarly attention, and *Words and Beyond* is an attempt to contribute some insights to that endeavour. A noteworthy aspect of this ebook is that all contributors are native linguists or scholars conducting research on their own languages and cultures, and we hope this gives a fresh perspective to linguistic studies of the region.

This ebook contains nine articles and a foreword by a well known linguist from the region. The first article, *A Study on Pregnancy and Birth Rituals of the Dimasas among the Dijuwa Area of Nagaland*, moves beyond the realm of formal linguistics and delves into the intersection of language and culture. It documents the rituals surrounding pregnancy and childbirth in Dimasa communities, shedding light on the ways language and culture are intertwined in the expression of social practices.

The second article, *Adverbs in Meiteilon: A Descriptive Study*, provides an insightful analysis of the syntactic and semantic

roles of adverbs in Meiteilon, one of the most widely spoken languages in Manipur. By focusing on adverbs, this article not only contributes to the description of Meiteilon but also serves as a valuable resource for further syntactic studies in Tibeto-Burman languages.

Phonology, a key area of linguistics, is well represented in this collection with multiple articles exploring the phonological systems of lesser-known languages. *Phonology of Atong Language* provides a comprehensive analysis of the Atong language, spoken by a small community in Meghalaya. Similarly, *A Preliminary Sketch of Sherpa Phonology* offers an initial work into the phonological system of the Sherpa language, contributing to the documentation of this important language spoken in the Himalayan region. Further, Another critical contribution to the phonological study of lesser-known languages is the article on the *Phonotactics of Ri-Bhoi Karbi*. This article delves into the permissible sound sequences in the Ri-Bhoi variety of Karbi, a language spoken in Assam.

*Tense and Aspect in Langa Variety of Yimkhiung* presents tense and aspect in the Langa variety of Yimkhiung, a language spoken in Nagaland. Plenty of data from this contribution will be extremely useful for further exploration of Yimkhiung Tense and Aspect. One of the more experimental studies in this collection is the *Preliminary Analysis of Voice Onset Time in Idu-Mishmi*, a language spoken in Arunachal Pradesh. This article offers a pioneering attempt to measure and analyze VOT in Idu-Mishmi. *Language in a Multilingual Setting* takes a broader sociolinguistic perspective and explores the vitality of Yimkhiung. This article is particularly relevant in the context of Northeast India, where many indigenous languages are struggling to survive alongside larger languages like Hindi, Assamese, and English. The final article in the collection,

*Documenting and Translating the Endangered Languages of Northeast India to Preserve the Vanishing Oral Literature*, addresses one of the most pressing challenges in the region—the preservation of endangered languages.

*Words and Beyond* is an indication to the vibrant linguistic diversity of Northeast India and a reminder of the importance of preserving and studying the languages that shape our world. It is hoped that this ebook will inspire further research in linguistics, ethnolinguistics and language documentation, particularly on the languages of Northeast India and all the linguistic data in this book will serve as a valuable resource for scholars, students, and language enthusiasts alike.

Editors

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Mataina, W., Raleng, K., & Teronpi. (Eds.). (2024). *W`rds and bey`nd: An interdisciplinary expl`rati`n `f N`rtheast Indian languages* (eBook). Sovima: Tetso College. Note: Associate Editors- Tsukhumla Yimchunger, Opangienla Kechu, Lungjangpou Remei & Limajungla Walling.

# A Study on Pregnancy and Birth Rituals among the Dimasas in the Dijuwa Region Nagaland

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## Abstract

The study attempts to understand the traditional animistic faith of the Dimasas and their practices, with special reference to pregnancy and post-birth rituals. Through this study, the author seeks to explore the concept of rituals observed in the socio-cultural aspects of their lives. Although the study is limited to birth-related rituals, it offers insights into how traditional faith is deeply rooted among the Dimasas. This work provides a glimpse into the religious life of the Dimasas and their understanding of the supernatural forces surrounding them. The animistic belief system shapes and guides their societal and cultural structure. It is also intriguing to note how they have retained their age-old traditions in the face of modernization, westernization, and globalization. In all the birth-related rituals, from delivery to post-birth, it is the womenfolk who play a pivotal role, making it a women-centric affair, unlike most rituals where the menfolk dominate, and women's participation is strictly limited. Lastly, this study emphasizes the importance of balancing belief and faith with adapting to the factors that come with modern times.

## Introduction

The etymological meaning of the term ‘Dimasa’ means ‘sons of the great river’ which has two possible interpretations of the origin of the river with the di-prefix, a) Brahmaputra river (old name Lohit<Louhit<Lau-hi ‘being long’ and b) Dhansiri river (old name Dima where from Dimapur kingdom is said to have derived its name). ‘Di’ means ‘water’, the suffixes- ‘ma’ means ‘big’ and ‘sa’ means ‘son’ (Longmailai, 2017).

The Dimasa Kacharis, and other Kachari groups like the Bodo-Kacharis, the Koches, the Rabhas, the Lalungs, the Tipperas, of North-East India refer to the same stock of people. Racially, the people of this stock belong to the Great-Bodo race, and linguistically, they belong to the Tibeto-Burman (Longmailai, 2017).The Dimasa presently inhabits parts of Assam and Nagaland. They are found in the present-day Dima Hasao, Karbi Anglong, Hojai, Nogaon and Dimapur. The name of the regional sub-groups of Dimasa are based on their area distribution and therefore, Ha-sao 'soil highland', Ha-war 'soil-plain', Dembra 'water rough/wild' and Di-juwa 'water-high level' are derived geographical names for the people inhabiting the regions and for the dialect or variety of Dimasa spoken: Hasao( Dima Hasao District) as the standard dialect among the other dialects, Hawar (Cachar), Dembra (Nagaon and Karbi Anglong) and Dijuwa (Karbi Anglong in Assam and Dimapur in Nagaland) (Longmailai, 2017).

**Religion Of Dimasas**

The Dimasas claim themselves to be the followers of Hinduism. It is said that the Dimasas converted themselves into Hinduism in the late 18th century. During the period when the Kachari king shifted his capital from Dimapur to Maibang and when the kingdom was threatened by the Jaintia king, the Kachari king shifted his capital from Maibang to Khaspur. It was during this time that the Kacharis came to be more under the influence of Hinduism. In 1790, Krishna Chandra and his brother Govind Chandra accepted Brahminism and were declared by the Brahmins as Hindus of the Kshatriya caste (Sharma, 1961). The Dimasas are followers of both Hinduism and Animism retaining their old age rituals, customs and beliefs. Dimasas, particularly animistic in nature, religion is transmitted to them by

their ancestors orally. Nature is the gift of their Madai (God). The people, even though they do not know the habitation of this Madai, experience his continuous presence in their midst through nature and natural objects. For the traditional Dimasas, religion means living in the spontaneous awareness and encounter with the acknowledgement of and obedience to the active reality of the presence of Madai and Madais (gods and spiritual beings) (Carpenter, 2017).

According to myth, Arikhidima, a bird, conceived upon her union with Bangla Raja and laid seven eggs, of which six hatched; namely, Sibarai, Alu Raja, Naikhu Raja, Waa Raja, Gunyung Braiyung, and Hamiadao. However, the seventh one didn't hatch until the sixth son Hamiadao forced it to break open and out came innumerable spirits, believed to be evil and the cause of woes in the society. The Dimasas believe that these benevolent ancestral gods preside over all the areas, in which they (the people) inhabit. Therefore, it is regarded that there are in total twelve such areas, where their ancestral god resides. These twelve areas are referred to as 'Daikho', where 'Dai' stands as a shortened form of 'Madai' which is a Dimasa word for 'god' and 'Kho' implies 'space' or 'place' (Thaosen).

The Dimasas believe that many spirits, considered to be evil, originated from the seventh egg and that these spirits cause trouble and illness among the people. Even today, rituals are performed and offerings are made to these deities in the forest, away from inhabited areas. Community members hold that, as nature worshipers, the Dimasas honor these spirits or deities within the natural environment of the forest.

**Beliefs Related To Pregnancy Complications**

Every traditional and social beliefs the world over, have in some way or the other a link with the natural forces that surround them. They feel there's some kind of communication with the natural phenomena where conscious communication takes place through offering of sacrifice or by performing rituals. Traditional religious beliefs are the set of ideal worldviews shared by a group of communities believing in the outer force of nature.

Tribal women believed that problems in pregnancy and childbirth were due to influence of evil demons living in forest and rivers or due to previous wrong deeds. Metallic wear, hooks, chillies and lemons etc. were generally used to deter evil spirits from pregnant women (Begum shahina, 2017).

The Dimasas believe that complications during pregnancy occur when the deity Baminjik disturbs the pregnancy cycle in return for a sacrifice to be offered. It is said that this ritual is performed particularly for pregnancy related complications. During complications if sacrifice is not offered the pregnancy period becomes critical which in some cases leads to miscarriage. Therefore, sacrifices and offerings are made seeking for peaceful and painless pregnancy.

**Ritual Related To Pregnancy Complications**

The ritual is performed by the Jonthai (Priest) along with the menfolk of the village where women's participation is prohibited. It is performed in a forested area where the priest offers sacrifice in the name of the deity(Baminjik). In the ritual, besides the main presiding deity, several other spirits/deities are also worshiped: Sukuraja Jig, Gezersa, Burungyadao, Dambrama, Lailidi and Daligima. Items required during the ritual are ;

1. 3 Hen
2. 3 Rooster
3. 1 pigeon
4. 6 egg

## Taboos Related With Pregnancy

According to Dimasas, when a woman is pregnant she must follow a number of Do's and Don'ts where in this case, both the husband and wife have to adhere to traditional taboos for the safety of the child. A pregnant woman should avoid places where incidents like accidents, funerals or for instance anything unpleasant has occurred; she is also restricted from attending the delivery of another woman as it is believed that the pain may pass on to her. One should also abstain from developing any feeling of hate or any kind of negative thoughts as it may affect the baby in the womb. She is restricted from consuming tobacco or alcohol as it is considered unhealthy which hampers the health of the baby as well as that of the mother and also to avoid any kind of complications for the baby and the mother. The woman is prohibited from consuming any dead animals or birds which are not slaughtered and has to avoid it strictly. There is a belief that one should not venture out in the evening as it is considered an unpleasant hour of the day; usually the hour for bad spirits. Even when the child is born, the mother and the newborn are prohibited from venturing out in the evening after sunset. The husband is prohibited from any activities that includes slaughtering of any animals or birds and should avoid getting into violence as it is considered inauspicious for the child. The Dimasas also believe that, when the menfolk go for community fishing the man whose wife is pregnant is

restricted from participating in the activity as they believe that the fishes in the river do not die despite using any traditional method to catch or kill the fish.

**Post Birth Rituals**

Post Birth the Dimasas perform three rituals namely, Daodi Daingba, Daosa Thaiba and Khalai Riba. The terms used for addressing the rituals are solely based on the research conducted in areas where these terms are used. The terms differ depending on the areas of the village however, their meaning remains the same. For instance, there are ten Dimasa villages in Nagaland and depending on the haphai (area) the terms for each ritual differ.

A unique feature of Post Birth ritual is that it is the midwives and the womenfolk (older in age those with knowledge and experience) who perform all post Birth Rituals. During the ritual menfolk or children do not take part as it is solely considered a womens' affair.

**Daodi Daingba**

This ritual is performed the following day after the birth of a child as Dimasas consider the community as 'Gushu' which means 'impure'. Hence, a purificatory ritual called 'Daodi Daingba' is observed as a part of purifying the community. As for the family, another ritual has to be observed after the child's umbilical cord falls off. The ritual is performed by the midwives along with a few elderly women possessing knowledge and experience. Items required for the ritual are: Laisho (banana leaves), Jugab (fermented rice), Judi (rice beer) Khunu ( cotton yarn) and Mustard oil.

The ritual is performed by the bank of the river or near water bodies where the main priest initiates the ritual by placing a pair of bamboo sticks

on the soil: one in the name of the deity and the other in the name of the newborn. Cotton yarn is then hung into two bamboo slitted sticks. Thereafter, Laisho (Banana leaves) cut into small pieces are placed in seven parts where Jugab (fermented rice) and Judi(rice beer) is poured on each banana leaf. After the arrangements, the main priest prays to the deity and lights the cotton yarns and judging the strength of the fire the priest foretells the welfare of the newborn. Then the top part of the egg is cracked and if the shell falls on its back it is an indication of bad sign and if it falls upward it is an indication of good fortune; hereafter, the rice beer is poured on each laisho (banana leaf) and the remaining is consumed by the attendees as part of the ritual. Finally, Mustard oil is poured upon the still water and it is said that, if the oil spreads widely then the newborn will lead a healthy and prosperous life and if the oil does not spread out extensively, it is an indication that the child will have problems growing up. The ritual concludes with a feast prepared by the family.

**Daosa Thaiba**

Daosa Thaiba is a ritual performed after the umbilical cord falls off from the newborn. It is observed to purify the family of the newborn as the Dimasas consider the birth of a child as 'Gushu'(impure). It is only after this ritual is performed that the husband can carry on and attend any social or communal activities in the village. On this day, the ceremony of shaving the child's hair is also observed. The rituals are observed by the midwives and a few other womenfolk of the village who have knowledge and experience. It is performed around the space where the placenta is buried post delivery. The Dimasas follow a custom of burying the placenta of the newborn: if it is a male child, the placenta is buried on the right side of the main door and if it

is a female child, it is buried on the left side. Items required for the rituals are; 1Hen and 1Rooster in the name of the deity and the newborn, Laisho (banana leaves), Jugab (fermented rice), Judi (rice beer), and Khunu ( cotton yarn).

Once the ritual is initiated, the priest along with the assisting priest inserts a pair of Bamboo sticks on the soil: one in the name of the deity and the other in the name of the newborn. Then the cotton yarn is hung into the bamboo poles and laisho (banana leaf) cut in small sizes are placed in seven different parts where Jugab(fermented rice) and Judi (rice beer) is poured into each banana leaf. After which, the Hen and Rooster are sacrificed and the feathers and intestine are placed then the droplets of blood are poured on each laisho(banana leaf) where the intestine of the sacrificed chicken is used as a means to predict the fortune of the child. It is believed that if a hole is found in the intestine it is an indication of bad omen and if no hole is found, it is an indication of good omen. The ritual is then followed by a feast prepared by the midwives and the elderly women. The utensils used during the preparation of the feast are not to be washed by other attendees but only by those who perform and help during the ritual as it is considered a taboo.

## Khalai Riba

It is a tradition observed in the name of the child and also to offer gratitude to the midwives and those womenfolk that assist from delivery to post birth rituals. On this day, they are highly honored and the husband and wife seek blessings and present them with gifts and honor them. The parents observe the custom based on their convenience, for some it is observed when the child is a year old or even when older. Post Birth ritual is considered incomplete without this one and it is believed that if in one’s life this ritual

was not performed, multiple casualties keep crossing the individual's life. Unlike the rituals mentioned in the above paragraph, in this ritual there are no restrictions on age and gender as menfolk, womenfolk and children also participate and join the feast.

## Conclusion

The findings depict the traditional and religious life of the Dimasas, their faith and belief in their ancestral deities. The Dimasas believe that the malevolent deities are the cause of all kinds of trouble, incident and sicknesses hence, multiple rituals are observed and sacrifices offered to appease the deity. The study brings to light how in the olden days, with the lack of advanced technology and advanced medical support they had to rely on beliefs, supernatural beings and traditional healers. Even in the present day, it is found that though the concept of advanced technology and medical treatment are much sought after they still practice and believe in their traditional method; incorporating 'duality' in their socio-cultural and religious life. This work however is limited and needs further study and research in the future.

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# Adverbs in Meiteilon: A Descriptive Study

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**Abstract**

Adverbs are often used as a generic term for leftover items that do not appear to belong elsewhere. Syntactically, adverbs are found on several different levels. They are often defined based on exclusion: they are modifiers of everything except for nouns (Schachter & Shopen, 2007). The term adverb here refers to both single-word adverbs and more complex constructions (adverbials). This paper attempts to classify Meiteilon adverbs as a class by itself and the ordering of Meiteilon adverbs is discussed. Later, in Section II, many functions of Meiteilon adverbs and different categories of adverbs available in this language are discussed. Finally, the study attempts to give a syntactic analysis of Meiteilon adverbs regarding its structural position.

## Introduction

Functionally, adverbs are parallel to adjectives. In the sense that they modify the verb in a predicating expression in the same way as adjectives modify the noun in a referring expression. In some languages this parallel is particularly clear while in others it is not as clear. For example; In English, most adverbs are derived from adjectives by adding the adverbial suffix –ly as in (2).

1. The song is beautiful.
2. She sang beautifully.

Jackendoff (1972) classifies adverbs into three broad categories, namely, speaker-oriented adverbs, subject-oriented adverbs, and manner

adverbs. Each type of these adverbs is associated with a particular semantic orientation. For instance, the speaker-oriented adverb refers to the attitude of the speaker. Syntactically, they are located at a precise position of a sentence periphery. Speaker oriented adverbs are situated at the left periphery (3), subject oriented adverbs seem to occupy a pre-verbal position (4) and manner adverbs occupy the right periphery (usually the final position of the sentence) (5).

3. a) Surprisingly, I do not like sweets.

   b) *I surprisingly do not like sweets.

   c) *I do not like sweets surprisingly.

4. a) *Deliberately, she came late.

   b) She deliberately came late.

   c) *She came late deliberately.

5. a) She dances beautifully.

   b) *She beautifully dances.

   c) *Beautifully, she dances.

This apparent compartmentalisation does not always hold true. For instance, Adverbs like angrily and stupidly can occur in different positions within the sentence (6, 7). However, different interpretations are available depending on the scope of the adverb.

6. He angrily stormed out

7. He stormed out angrily.

Adverbs can also be classified in two categories based on where they appear in the sentence structure. They are higher adverbs and lower adverbs. Higher adverbs primarily consist of the adverb types: speech act adverb, evaluative adverb, evidential adverb, tense adverb, irrealis mood adverb and modal necessity and possibility adverbs. The second category of adverbs, known as lower adverbs, is aspectual adverbs and manner adverbs.

## Analysis

Meiteilon has the following types of adverbs presented in a tabular form (Table 1) given below.

***Table 1: Types of Meiteilon Adverbs.***

| **Adverbs** | **Gloss** | **Adverb** | **Gloss** |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Mood Adverbs** | | **T e m p o r a l** | |
| Speech act<br>təseŋ-na<br>səm-na<br>thaja-də-na | Honestly/frankly<br>In short/brief<br>Unbelievably | Anterior<br>hanna-na | Already |
| Evaluative<br>laibak phədə-na | Fortunately | Past<br>nahan amuk | Once |
| | | Future<br>kon-nə | Later |
| **Modal Adverbs** | | **Modal Adverbs** | |
| Necessity<br>ya-də-da-na | Unable to carry out something due to | Volitional<br>thəwoi-na | Deliberately |

| **A s p e c t u a l** | | **A s p e c t u a l** | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Habitual<br>ənəmbəna | Usually | Frequentative<br>toi-na | Frequently |
| Repetitive<br>hənjin hənjin | Repeatedly | Celerative<br>thuna | quickly |
| Perfective<br>ədum | Always | Continuative<br>həujiksu | Even now/ still |
| Retrospective<br>khudəkta | Immediately | Voice<br>phəjə-na | Well |
| Proximate<br>ikui kuidə-na | Soon after | Durative<br>ŋaihak | Briefly |
| Completive<br>loi-na | All | - | - |

## The Case Of Meiteilon Adverbs

In Meiteilon, generally an adverbial affix -nə can be attached to adjectival and verbal stems (8b) to derive adverbs. However, there are time adverbs (hujik ‘now’, ŋaihak ‘briefly’, etc.) and some speech act adverbs (əseŋbəgisu ‘truly’) that do not take the adverbial suffix -nə (9).

8. a) nuŋsi-bə əŋaŋ əmə ləi-re

love-NMZ baby one exist-PERF

‘There is a lovely baby.’

b) əŋaŋ do nuŋsi-nə təubi-u

baby DEM love-ADV treat-IMP

'Treat the baby with love.'

9. a) əi hujik yum-da ləi-re

1S now home-LOC be-PERF

"I am at home now."

b) lai asi əseŋbəgisu phajəi

picture this truly beautiful

"This picture is truly beautiful"

Bhat and Ningomba (1995) claim that the suffix -nə can be attached to any verb to form an adverb in Meiteilon. However, if the adverbs are derived from action verbs then these V+nə forms can exist only in fully reduplicated forms. Such construction gives the meaning of two events happening simultaneously.

10. *əi ca-na phi thup-i

1S eat-ADV clothes fold-IND

"I fold clothes while I eat."

11. əi ca-na ca-na phi thup-i

1S eat-ADV eat-ADV clothes fold-IND

"I fold clothes while I eat."

12. mə-hak cen-na cen-na chət-kh-re

3S-HON run-ADV run-ADV go-PAST-PERF

"He had gone (by) running

Other types of reduplicated adverbs are also available in Meiteilon. However, these adverbs do not change the semantic structure of the sentence.

13. mə-hak lairik kən-na kən-na pa-i

3S-HON book hard-ADV hard-ADV read-IND

"S/he studies hard."

Meiteilon adverbs can modify sentences (14), adjectives (15) and verbs (16) as well. Like in many other languages Meiteilon adverbs show a relatively free distribution (17a, b, c).

14. yam thajə-də-nə memi mayum-pankhre

very believe-NEG-ADV memi married.

"Very unbelievably, Memi got married."

15. tombi təseŋ-nə cəm-bə nupi-məca-ni

Tombi real-ADV simple-NMZ woman-small-COP

'Tombi is a really simple girl.'

16. əŋaŋ do təseŋ-nə wa-re

baby DEM real-ADV tire-PERF

'The baby is really tired.'

17. a) thəwoi-nə tombi-na əŋaŋ do kəp-həl-i

deliberate-ADV tombi-SUB baby DEM cry-CAUS-IND

'Deliberately, Tombi made the baby cry.'

b) tombi-na thəwoi-nə əŋaŋ do kəp-həl-i

tombi-SUB deliberate-ADV baby DEM cry-CAUS-IND

'Tombi deliberately made the baby cry.'

c) tombi-na əŋaŋ do thəwoi-nə kəp-həl-i

tombi-SUB baby DEM deliberate-ADV cry-CAUS-IND

'Tombi made the baby cry deliberately.'

Languages like Italian which identifies adverbs as a distinct lexical category have the following features: stacking, degree modification, and the presence of speaker oriented meanings. Such features may point to a lexical class of adverbs.

18. *Da all`ra, n`n hann` di s`lit` mica più sempre c`mpletamente rimess` tutt` bene in `rdine.*

"Since then they haven't usually any longer always put everything well in order."

(Cinque 1999: 45)

Meiteilon adverbs allow stacking as shown in sentence (19).

19. ŋasai memi tomba-da taseŋna ŋəkna hənjin hənjin yeŋ-khi

earlier today memi tomba-DAT really shockingly repeatedly look-PST

"Earlier Memi repeatedly looked at Tomba in real shock."

Meiteilon adverbs have degree modifiers. Meiteilon adverbs and adjectives have the same set of degree modifiers (20a, b).

20. a) əi hen-nə thu-bə thəbək əmə ləi-re

1S more quick-NMZ work one exist-PERF

'I have a more urgent work.'

b) ma-nə hen-nə thu-nə thəbək adu təu-khi

3S-ERG more-ADV urgent-ADV work DEM do-PAST

'He did the work more urgently.'

Meiteilon has speaker oriented adverbs (21).

21. əŋəkpa əma oina əi əthumba pam-de

surprisingly 1S sweet like-NEG

"Surprisingly, I dislike sweets."

Although, major portion of the Meiteilon adverbs are derived from verbal roots, the examples above (19-21) show that Meiteilon adverbs have the identifying features of stackability, degree modification and speaker orientedness to be a distinct lexical category.

## Relative Order Of Meiteilon Adverbs

Adverbs generally have a free range of distribution. In other words, an adverb can appear in various positions in a sentence. In English, the adverb quickly can occur in the initial position (22), the preverbal position (23) or the final position (24).

22. Quickly, the cat jumped over the fence.

23. The cat quickly jumped over the fence.

24. The cat jumped over the fence quickly.

Similarly, in Meiteilon an adverb can appear in the initial position (25), pre-verbal positions (26, 27) as well as the final position (28).

25. thuna həudoŋadu thuna sambal coŋ-kh-i

quickly cat DEM quickly fence jump-PAST-IND

"The cat quickly jumped the fence."

26. həudoŋadu thuna sambal coŋ-khi

cat DEM quickly fence jump-PAST

"The cat quickly jumped the fence."

27. həudoŋadu sambal thuna coŋ-khi

cat DEM fence quickly jump-PAST

"The cat quickly jumped the fence."

28. həudoŋadu sambal coŋ-khi thuna

cat DEM fence jump-PAST quickly

"The cat jumped the fence quickly.

The examples (25 – 28) show that Meiteilon adverbs have a relatively free order of distribution within a sentence.

Now let us look at the structural position adverbs occupy in a Meiteilon sentence. In English some adverbs can occur in the initial position and they may be accompanied by a coma intonation (29, 30, 31).

29. Quickly, the cat jumped over the fence.

30. Often, I go for evening walks.

31. Once, Renedy taught us how to play football.

In this regard we may refer to the English data and exemplify it with Meiteilon examples. It may be beneficial to recall that Meiteilon has four main types of adverbs (Thangjam, 2013), as previously mentioned in Table 1: Mood adverbs (Speech act, Evaluative), Modal adverbs (Necessity, Volition), Temporal adverbs (Anterior, Past, Future) and Aspectual Adverbs (Habitual, Frequentative, Repetitive, Perfective, Continuative, Retrospective, Voice, Proximate, Durative, Resultative, Completive).

While Meiteilon allows most adverbs to occupy the sentence initial position (32, 33, 34) the frequentative and resultative adverbs (35, 36) cannot occur at this position.

32. thuna cak thoŋ-o

quickly rice cook-IMP

“Quickly, cook food.”

33. nahan tomba sida lak-ləm-i

the other day tomba here come-DIST-IND

“The other day, Tomba had come here.”

34. hərauna memi school cət-li

happily memi school go-IND

"Happily, Memi goes to school."

35. (a) *toina tomba sana-ba cət-li

often Tomba play-INF go-IND

"Often, Tomba goes to play."

(b) tomba toina sana-ba cət-li

Tomba often play-INF go-IND

"Tomba often goes to play."

36. (a) *loina ceŋ loi-kh-re

completely rice over-PAST-PERF

"The rice had completely got over."

(b) ceŋ loina loi-kh-re

rice completely over-PAST-PERF

"The rice had completely got over."

The slots that precede finite verbs and participles are known as preverbal slots. More often than not these slots are occupied by adverbs. A large number of English adverbs can occupy this position (37a, 37b, 38a).

37. (a) The cat quickly jumped over the fence.

(b) The cat has quickly jumped over the fence.

(c) The cat quickly has jumped over the fence.

38. (a) The crops are completely damaged by the flood.

(b) *The crops completely are damaged by the flood.

The adverbs quickly and completely can precede the main verb. The pre-verb, post-auxiliary position is marked (37c, 38b). Let us compare the English data to the corresponding data in Meiteilon. It is worth mentioning that Meiteilon does not have auxiliary modal verbs. Instead this language uses a verbal complex which functions as probability or possibility modal. Such verbal complexes consist of the non-finite form of the main verb and the verbal root ya ‘agree’ in its various inflectional forms:

39. (a) tomba lairik pa-rəm-ba ya-i

Tomba book read-DIST-NMZ agree-IND

“Tomba may be studying.”

(b) tomba lairik kənna pa-rəm-ba ya-i

Tomba book hard read-DIST-NMZ agree-IND

“Tomba may be studying hard.”

(c) tomba kənna lairik pa-rəm-ba ya-i

Tomba hard book read-DIST-NMZ agree-IND

“Tomba may be studying hard.”

(d) * kənna tomba lairik pa-rəm-ba ya-i

Hard Tomba book read-DIST-NMZ agree-IND

“*Hard, Tomba may be studying.”

(e)* tomba lairik pa-rəm-ba kənna ya-i

Tomba book read-DIST-NMZ hard agree-IND

"*Tomba may be hard studying."

(f)* tomba lairik pa-rəm-ba ya-i kənna

Tombabook read-DIST-NMZ agree-IND hard

"Tomba may be studying hard."

From the above examples (39b, c, d, e, f), we can see that in a Meiteilon sentence with a verbal complex, an adverb can occur only before the verbal complex (39b, c). However, the rest of the positions are restricted for the occurrence of adverbs. This includes the initial position of a sentence (39d), inside the verbal complex (39e) and after the verbal complex (39f).

The sentence's final position is also generally known as the post-verbal position. Most non-ly adverbs in English are post-verbal (40):

40. (a) Mary can run fast.

(b) *Mary fast can run.

(c) *Mary can fast run.

(d) ?Fast, Mary can run.

Similar to English, some restriction on the placement of adverbs at the final position of a sentence may be observed in Meiteilon as well. Some Meiteilon adverbs like manner adverb thuna, kənna, cannot occupy the final position (41b, 42b):

41. (a) həudoŋ ədu thuna cen-kh-re

cat DEM quickly run-PAST-PERF

"The cat ran away quickly."

(b) *həudoŋ ədu cen-kh-re thuna

cat DEM run-PAST-PERF quickly

"The cat ran away quickly."

42. (a) noŋ kənna cu-ri

rain hard rain-PROG

"It is raining heavily."

(b) *noŋ cu-ri kənna

rain rain-PROG hard

"It is raining heavily."

It may be noted, while many Meiteilon adverbs can occur at the final position (43, 44) no adverb is restricted only to this particular position.

43. (a) memi gari yaŋna thəu-i

Memi vehicle fast drive-IND

"Memi drives fast."

(b) memi gari thəu-i yaŋna

Memi vehicle drive-IND fast

"Memi drives fast."

44. (a) taseŋna mə-hak hərau-khi

Really 3S-HON happy-PAST

"Really he was happy."

(b) mə-hak təseŋna hərau-khi

3S-HON really happy-PAST

“He was really happy.”

(c) ? mə-hak hərau-khi taseŋna

3S-HON happy-PAST really

“He was really happy.”

From the examples given above (27- 44) it can be established that Meiteilon adverbs can appear in four sentential positions: initial position, two slots in the pre-verbal position and the final/ post-verbal position.

**Syntax Of Meiteilon Adverbs**

Adverbs can also be classified in two categories based on where they appear in the sentence structure (Cinque 1999). They are higher adverbs and lower adverbs. Higher adverbs primarily consist of the adverb types: speech act adverb, evaluative adverb, evidential adverb, tense adverb, irrealis mood adverb and modal necessity and possibility adverbs. The second category of adverbs, known as lower adverbs is aspectual adverbs and manner adverbs.

Thangjam (2013) adopts two theories to classify Meiteilon adverbs. In the first theory, Kayne (1994) notes that adverbs are base-adjoined to the specifier position of XP.

45. [XP Yesterday X0 [IP Peter danced]

In the above sentence (45) the adverb yesterday and the root IP Peter danced are adjoined to a functional head X0. It can be seen that the adverb yesterday is base-adjoined at the Specifier position of XP which can be

supported by Cinque (1999). In the second theory, Cinque (1999) states that adverbs are base-generated at different specifiers positions of distinct functional heads. Thangjam (2013) also assumes Split-INFL (Pollock, 1989) hypothesis for analysing the syntactic structures of adverbs in Meiteilon.

She claims that the higher adverb təseŋna is situated at the sentence initial position. Since, speaker-oriented adverbs are indicative of speech act mood, it can be said that such adverbs are located at the Spec positions of MoodPSpeechact which in turn is located above the AgrsP as shown below (46) and a tree structure (47) that follows.

46. a. TaseNna, Chaobi-na phurit-to pam-khi (Thangjam 2013:142)

Frankly/Truly Chaobi-NOM shirt-the like-Pst

"Frankly, Chaobi liked the shirt."

b. Chaobi-na TaseNna phurit-to pam-khi

Chaobi-NOM frankly/truly shirt-the like-Pst

"Chaobi truly liked the shirt."

c. Chaobi-na phurit-to TaseNna pam-khi

Chaobi-NOM shirt-the frankly/truly like-Pst

"Chaobi truly liked the shirt."

d. Chaobi-na phurit-to pam-khi TaseNna

Chaobi-NOM shirt-the like-Pst frankly/truly

"Chaobi liked the shirt, truly."

47.

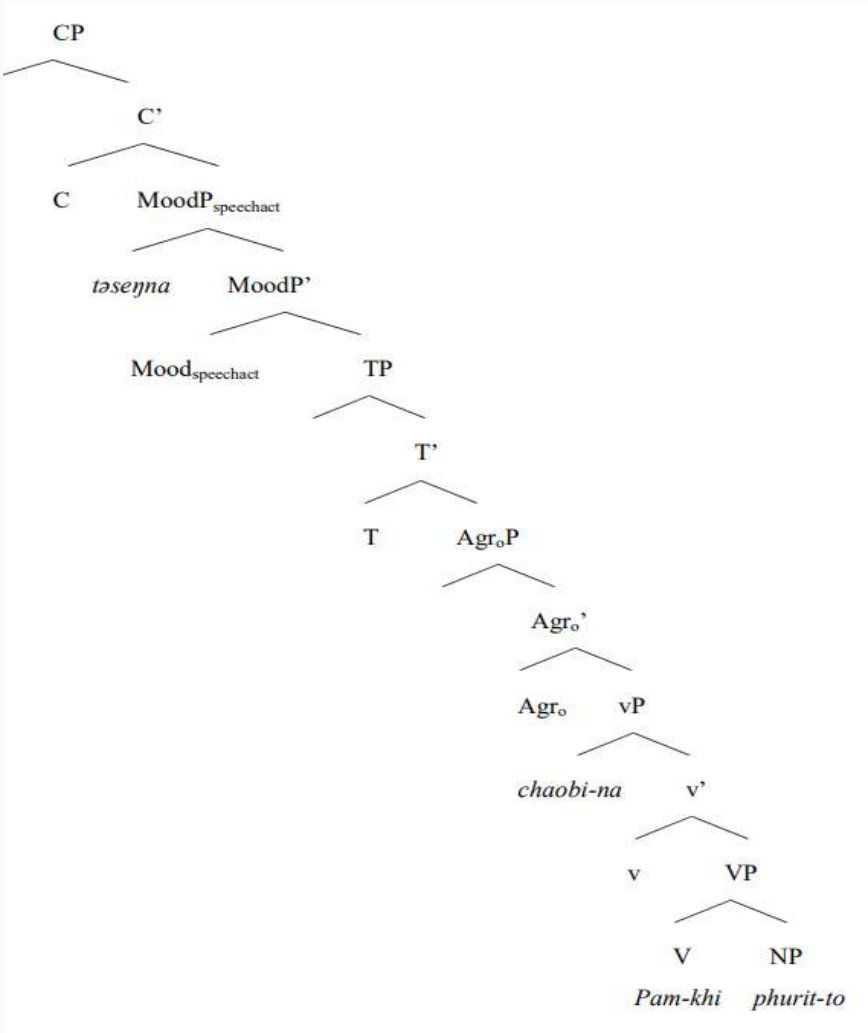


**Figure 1: Syntactic structure of speaker-oriented adverbs in Meiteilon (Thangjam, 2013)**

With regards to the above data (46a - d), note that the (d) version is the only unacceptable version, where a speech act adverb like təseŋnə is in

the final position of a sentence. This restriction in the order is quite significant, and can be claimed to require a specific set of movements which go on to determine the extent of Verb-movement in Meiteilon. Let us demonstrate this in some detail.

Recall that Thangjam follows the Kaynean (Kayne, 1994) structure in her derivations of the Meiteilon sentences, that is, an SVO initial structure is assumed. Here, we propose to deal with the Meiteilon adverbial placement issue from the perspective of a more standard SOV word order.

Note that the above tree diagram in figure 1 (47), if drawn from the point of view an SOV order would look like the following figure 2 (48):

48.

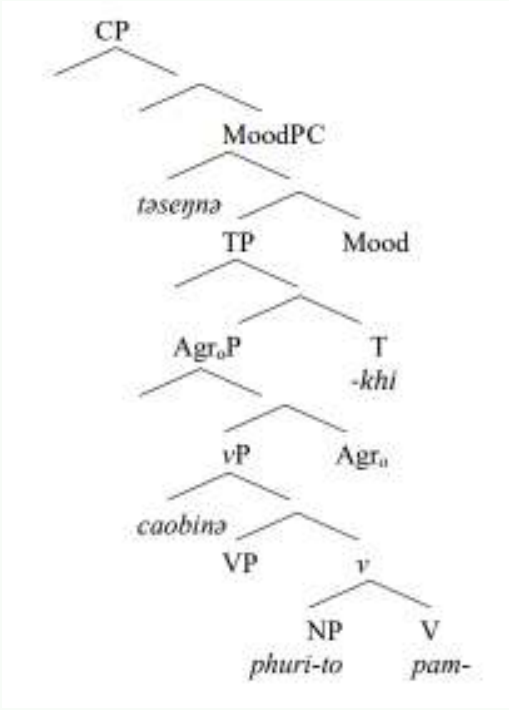


**Figure 2. Syntactic structure of Meiteilon speaker-oriented adverbs in SOV word order**

In order to produce the neutral order as in (46a) there is no need for any phrasal movement. As far as Head-movement is concerned, it looks like the verb having the need to move to at least (and we will show below, also at most) the T head in order to collect the tense/aspectual morphology -khi.

In order to derive (46b) and (46c) orders, both of which are grammatical, we need to resort to remnant movement at least in the case of the (46c) version, as in Thangjam (2013). For the (46b) version, only the subject needs to move further up to the [Spec,C] position, perhaps via the [Spec,TP] position. But for the (46c) version, we require remnant movement of the small vP. Thus, we need the V to first vacate the VP, and then the vP as well; that is, the verb must move all the way to the T position. After this obligatory Head-movement, the whole vP moves up the [Spec,CP] position, to derive the (46c) version of the example.

To account for the ungrammaticality of (46d) we follow the logic of Remnant Movement. To derive the order in (46d), we will need to move the verb head even higher than T, possibly to at least the Mood position. But the fact that (46d) is ungrammatical or highly unacceptable militates against head-raising the verb-complex from T to M. The reason why (46d) is ungrammatical is due to the failure of the verb to head raise beyond the T head. That is, as mentioned above, this set of examples, therefore, prove that the verb head in Meiteilon can raise up to the T head position and not beyond it.

## Conclusion

The study discusses Meiteilon adverbs from various perspectives. Firstly, Meiteilon adverbs are categorised as a separate word class by establishing that adverbs in Meiteilon allow stacking, degree modification and they also

carry speaker-oriented meaning. Secondly, the relative order of Meiteilon adverb occurrence is discussed which concludes that adverbs generally have a free range of distribution in the Meiteilon sentence structure. They can appear in four positions of the sentence: sentence initial position, two slots in the pre-verbal position and the final or post-verbal position. Most Meiteilon adverbs occur in the initial position except for the frequentative toina and the resultative loina. Meiteilon pre-verbal position is occupied by most types of adverbs as well as modal adverbials. The language used verbal complex as a strategy to convey modal auxiliaries as Meiteilon lacked modal auxiliaries. Apart from manner adverbs and the verbal complex mentioned above, the majority of Meiteilon adverbs can occur in the final position. Addressing popular theories regarding the debate of whether to treat adverbs as the Specifier of a dedicated functional head, as an adjunct, as a head or as a complement of the verbal domain, the study concludes that the generated-in-spec principle is best suited for the description and function of Meiteilon adverbs.

## Abbreviations

1S First person singular

2S Second person singular

3S Third person singular

ADV Adverbial Marker

AGR Agreement

CAUS Causative

COP Copula

DAT Dative

DEM Demonstrative

DIST Distance

EGR Ergative

HON Honourific

IMP Imperative

IND Indicative

INF Infinitive

LOC Locative

NEG Negation

NOM Nominative Case

NMZ Nominalizer

PAST Past

PERF Perfect

PROG Progressive

Pst Past

SPEC Specifier

SUB Subject

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# Phonology of Atong Language

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## Abstract

This paper presents an overview of the phonology of the Atong language, which is a Tibeto-Burman language spoken by the Atong people in Northeast India. The study explores the segmental features of the language, focusing on the consonant and vowel inventory, sound patterns and distribution, and the syllable structure of the language. The study employs the methodology of data collection from the native speakers of the language along with the help of computational software to organise and analyse the collected data. The analysis reveals a rich consonant system and vowel system with a variety of distinction between sounds. The study also delves into the syllable structure of the language. The study examines phonemes and tries to identify the speech patterns of the language. The study aims to shed light on an endangered language by unravelling the phonological patterns and principles that govern the language. It can provide the foundation for further research on the language.

## 1. Introduction

### *1.1. The At`ng Language And Pe`ple*

The Atong language is a language spoken in the North-East Indian State of Meghalaya. It belongs to the Tibeto-Burman language family. The Atong speakers inhabit the areas along the banks of the Simsang River. Almost all Atong people follow Christian religion. The language is heavily influenced by the A·chik(Garo) population and therefore the Garo language and culture has a huge impact on Atong culture and also the language.

According to the oral legends that are prevalent among the Garos, the Garos had migrated from a place called Tibotgre, located in the modern-day Tibetan plateau. They migrated from the place because of a series of famines under the leadership of Jappa- Jallimpa and Sukpa-Bonggepa in two separate groups. During this migration from the Himalayas to present-day Cooch Bihar, due to shortage of food, they ate the manuscripts written in animal hides, containing the original orthographical script. From Cooch Bihar, they moved towards the plains of Assam. After crossing the Bhramaputra river, known as Songdu in Garo, they were joined by the other group that is mentioned above. They then moved westwards in several groups and settled along the present-day Garo Hills.

There are no written documents to support these claims, but there are instances of Garo villages that are found along the said migration routes. There are instances of Garo Villages from the border of Arunachal Pradesh, all along the banks of the Bhramaputra river to the plains of Assam. The Garos and the Atongs have a very similar traditional culture, whether it is influenced or not. They were historical accounts of blood feud between villages; they would cut off the heads of their enemies and drink their blood, then carry the heads of their victims as trophies. The staple food is rice, although millets, maize, etc., are taken. They eat all kinds of meat and hunting is prominent in the agriculture off-season. Rice-beer was essential in daily life as well as in rituals. Garos use musical instruments such as drums, bamboo string instruments (chigring), wind instruments, metal gongs, etc. An assortment of these instruments are used in ceremonies, rituals and for celebrations. The economy is largely characterised by Agriculture, cultivation of rice is very important. They practise shifting or Jhum

cultivation. Besides rice, other types of crops, fruits and vegetables are cultivated. The Garos are often divided according to their dialects, geographical distribution and customs. These subdivisions are A·beng, A·we, Atong, Chibok, Chisak, Dual, Gara- Ganching, Matabeng, Matchi, Megam and Ruga. Of which Atong, Megam and Ruga are not mutually intelligible among other 'dialects.'

The A·we, which is considered and accepted to be the standard variety is spoken in the whole Northern parts of Garo Hills in Meghalaya and the Kamrup district of Assam. Atong is spoken in South Garo Hills and West Khasi Hills Districts of Meghalaya, all the way to the Bangladesh border along the banks of the Simsang River. Although considered to be a dialect of Garo, the spoken language is more directly related to Rabha and Koch. Chisak is mainly spoken in the East Garo Hills District. Matchi is spoken in the capital of East Garo Hills, Williamnagar. The Chisaks live east of the Am·beng. Duals live immediately south of the Chisaks, along the banks of Simsang River. Majority of them are found in Bangladesh. The Gara-Ganching live in the areas south of Durama Range, which extends all the way from the Tura peak towards Siju.

The Matabengs are found in the valley of the Simsang river with close vicinity to Am·beng and Matchi groups. The Matchis live in the central valley of the Simsang River, directly south of the A·wes and West of Duals. The Megams are found in the West Khasi Hills district of Meghalaya. They are also a sub-division of Khasis called Lyngam. Their culture and tradition is more closely related to Garo but their language is more related to Khasi. This mixing may have developed to aid in commerce and communication among different tribes. The Chiboks live in a village called Rugapara on the

banks of Bogai river. The Rugas live in Western parts of Garo Hills, they are also not mutually intelligible among other dialects.

Apart from these subdivisions, the Garos are further divided into an exogamous section called Katchi. The majority of Garos are Sangmas and Maraks which are distributed throughout the divisions. Momin was usually confined to the A·wes but now, has spread throughout Garo Hills due to intermarriage and migration. The others are Shira and Arengh. The Katchi are further divided into Ma·chongs. Which is usually written before the Katchi in written form.

Garo marriage is strictly exogamous. The husband and wife must belong to different clans and motherhood. A Sangma boy cannot marry a Sangma girl. Nowadays, these marriages are being done if the boy and girl are not closely related and are not from the same Ma·chong. Almost all the Garos follow Christianity. As early as 1947, the American Baptist missionaries entered Garo Hills in which they established a school at Goalpara.

The Catholic Mission expanded its activities from the 1960s. The headquarter of Garo Hills, Tura officially became a diocese in 1973. Traditional practices have dwindled after the spread of Christianity, but many successful programmes were launched to preserve the 'Songsarek' (Animism) way of the Garos. Traditional celebrations such as Wangala are celebrated before the harvest of crops and are still being celebrated both in Asanang and Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh.

Most Garo celebrations are agriculture related. The traditional cultures of the Garos are fast disappearing in some areas due to lack of

practice. Due to expansion of education among the youths, they could not spare time for nurturing the traditional dance forms.

*1.2. Ge`graphic Distributi`n*

The Atong language is mainly spoken in South Garo Hills and West Khasi Hills Districts of Meghalaya. The linguistic neighbours of the language are A·chik(Garo), Khasi and Bengali.

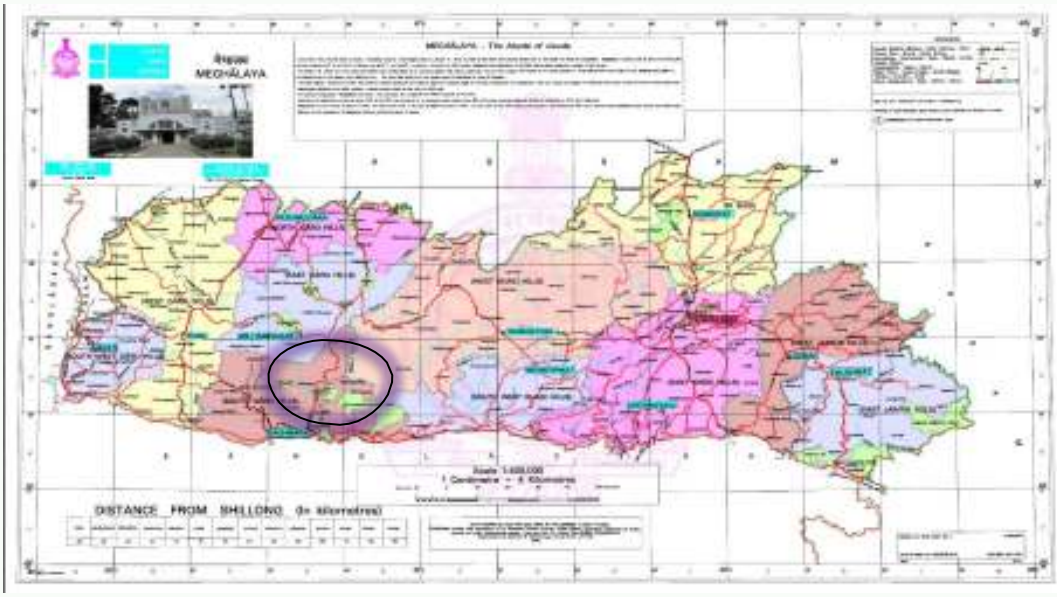


**Figure 1. Map of Meghalaya Note.**

The black circle roughly shows the area where the speakers of Atong mainly reside. The Garos mainly reside in all Garo Hills districts of Meghalaya.

*1.3. Linguistic Affiliati`n*

The Along language is a member of the Tibeto-Burman subgroup of the Sino-Tibetan Language family. It belongs to the Boro-Garo subgroup. Linguists like Robinson (1855), Shafer (1955), Benedict (1972), Matisoff

(1978 & 2003), Burlings (1983 & 2003), De Lancey (1987 & 1988), Bradley (1997 & 2002) and others have classified Garo language as a part of the Tibeto-Burman family. A family tree diagram given by Benedict (1972) has divided the Tibeto-Burman family into seven sub- branches.

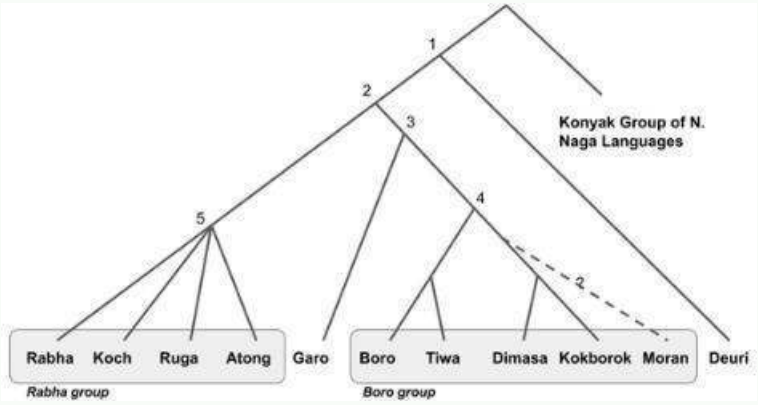


**Figure 2. Boro-Garo Group Language Family Tree (Burling, 1983)**

As seen in Figure 2, the Atong language is more closely related to Rabha and Koch than Garo even though they are linguistic neighbours. (Burling 1983).

*1.4. P`pulati`n*

According to the 2001 Census, Meghalaya has a population of 23,060069. East Garo Hills with the population of 2,47,555, West Garo Hills with the population of 5,15,813 and South Garo Hills with the population of 99,105. These were the three main districts that the Garos of Meghalaya reside in.

*1.5. Status*

Atong is considered to be endangered. The language is considered by the Government as a dialect of the Garo language, because almost all Atong speakers are bilingual and can speak the Garo language, the opposite is not

the case. The languages are not mutually intelligible, because they are two different languages. The Government does not recognise Atong as a distinct language. This creates problems in understanding the actual number of speakers of the language.

## 2. Phonology

### *2.1. C`ns`nants*

Consonant phonemes of Atong can be categorised into their manner of articulation, viz., plosives, nasals, trills, fricatives, affricates and approximants. They occur in the following places of articulation – bilabial, alveolar, alveo-palatal, velar and glottal. There are 17 consonants. The following section describes each phoneme with examples. The contrast among phonemes is shown in minimal pairs.

#### *2.1.1 Overview Of C`ns`nant Ph`nemic Invent`ry*

The consonant phonemes that are found in Atong are p, (p), b, t,( t), d, k, (k), g, ʔ, m, n, ŋ, r, s,t͡ɕ, d͡ʑ, h, l and w. The list of consonant phonemes is given in the table below.

***Table 1. Consonant Phonemic Inventory***

| | bilabial | | alveol | alveo- | velar | glot |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| plosive | p | t | | | k | |
| | b | d | | | g | ʔ |
| | (p) | | (t) | | (k) | |
| nasal | m | n | | | ŋ | |
| trill | | r | | | | |
| fricative | | | | s | | h |
| affricates | | | | t͡ɕ d͡ʑ | | |
| approxi | | l | | | w | |

Note. Where symbols appear in pairs, the one on the right represents a voiced consonant and the one on the left represents a voiceless consonant.

*2.1.2. C`ns`nant Minimal Pairs*

The consonant minimal Pairs show the distinct phonemes in Atong language, they are given below:

***Table 2. Bilabial stops minimal pairs***

| Bilabial Stops | |
|---|---|
| /p/ | /b/ |
| bipa | biba |
| ‘male' | ‘when' |

***Table 3. Alveolar stops minimal pairs***

| Alveolar Stops | |
|---|---|
| /t/ | /d/ |
| kaʔtoŋ<br><br>‘heart’ | kaʔdoŋ<br><br>‘to hope’ |

***Table 4. Velar stops minimal pairs***

| Velar Stops | |
|---|---|
| /k/ | /g/ |
| koroŋ | goroŋ |
| ‘horn' | ‘meet' |

***Table 5. Nasals minimal triplets***

| Nasals | | |
|---|---|---|
| /m/ | /n/ | /ŋ/ |
| kem | ken | keŋ |
| ‘drum’ | ‘to scratch’ | ‘to be alive’ |

***Table 6. Fricatives minimal pairs***

| Fricatives | |
|---|---|
| /s/ | /h/ |
| sɑi | hɑi |
| ‘husband’ | ‘let’s go’ |

***Table 7. Affricates minimal pairs***

| Affricates | |
|---|---|
| /d͡ʐ/ | /t͡ɕ/ |
| d͡ʐol | t͡ɕol |
| ‘idea’ | ‘to roll up’ |

***Table 8. Approximants and trill minimal pairs***

| Approximants and trill | |
|---|---|
| /w/ | /r/ |
| ‿tɕɑwɑ | ‿tɕɑrɑ |
| ‘to winnow’ | ‘mother’s brothers’ |
| /l/ | /r/ |
| kɑl | kɑr |
| ‘hole’ | ‘to peel off’ |

***Table 9. Nasal with glottal stop minimal pairs***

| Nasal with Glottal Stop | |
|---|---|
| /ŋ/ | /ʔ/ |
| nɑŋ | naʔ |
| ‘need’ | ‘fish’ |

*2.1.3. C`ns`nant Ph`nemes Distributi`n And Descripti`n*

The distribution of phonemes is shown in the chart below:

***Table 10. Consonant Phoneme Distribution***

| phonemes | initial | final |
|---|---|---|
| p | - | + |
| (p) | + | - |
| b | + | - |
| t | - | + |
| (t) | + | - |
| d | + | - |
| k | - | + |
| (k) | + | - |
| g | + | - |
| ʔ | - | + |
| m | + | + |
| n | + | + |
| ŋ | - | + |
| r | + | + |
| s | + | + |
| h | + | - |
| t͡ɕ | + | - |
| d͡ʑ | + | - |
| l | + | + |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| w | + | - |

As seen in Table 10, All consonant phonemes in Atong can take the word-medial position. All Voiceless Plosives cannot occur in the word-initial positions and Voiced Plosives cannot occur in the word-final position. Nasals occur in word-initial position, medial-position and word-final position except for the phoneme /ŋ/ which cannot occur in word-initial position. Both fricatives and affricates cannot occur in word-final positions except for /s/ which can occur word-finally but only in loan words, e.g., /itihɑs/ 'history' (which originates from Sanskrit). /w/ approximant does not occur word-finally, /l/ approximant occurs in all word positions.

*2.1.3.1. Descripti`n Of St`ps*

*Bilabial St`ps*

The voiceless bilabial plosive /p/ is produced when the vocal cords do not touch each other and there are minimal vibrations. It is bilabial so it is articulated with both lips. /p/ is the allophone of /p/, it is aspirated and voiceless. /p/ occurs only in syllable-initial positions.

kɑp 'to catch'

poŋ 'fireplace'

The voiced bilabial /b/ is produced by obstructing air-flow in the vocal tract. It is articulated with both lips and it is voiced which means the vocal cords vibrate during articulation. It does not occur syllable-finally.

bɾɯi 'four'

dɑbɑ 'coconut'

*Alve`lar St`ps*

The voiceless alveolar stop /t/ is produced by obstructing air-flow, it is a plosive. It is alveolar, meaning tongue is against the alveolar ridge, it is usually the tip of the tongue that touches the alveolar ridge.

bɯt ‘pull, drag’

It has one allophone /t/ which is aspirated and voiceless and occurs only in the initial syllable position.

tɯi ‘water’

The alveolar stop /d/ is a plosive. The sound is produced by blocking the airflow entirely. The phonation is voiced.

diri ‘to hold’

*Velar St`ps*

The voiceless velar stop /k/ is produced by touching the back of the tongue in the velum. It is voiceless meaning airflow is obstructed.

dok ‘weave’

It has the allophone /k/ which is aspirated and occurs only in the syllable initial position.

ki ‘to count’

The voiced velar stop /g/ is produced by touching the back of the tongue in either the soft-palate or velum. It has no allophones. Occurs only in the syllable initial position.

gul ‘collect’

*Gl`ttal St`p*

The glottal stop /ʔ/ is produced by blocking the airflow in the glottis. It occurs only in the final syllable position.

demʔ ‘fold’

*Nasals*

The voiced bilabial /m/ is produced with the nasal cavity and articulated with both the lips. Occurs both syllable initially and syllable finally.

melʔ ‘fat’

nem ‘good, desirable’

The voiced alveo-dental nasal /n/ is produced when the tip of the tongue touches either the back of the upper teeth or the alveolar ridge. The air is passed through the nasal cavity. Occurs both syllable initially and syllable finally.

nisi ‘poison’

ain ‘law’

The voiced velar nasal /ŋ/ is produced when the back of the tongue touches the velum. The air is passed through the nasal cavity. It occurs only in the syllable final position.

nokweŋ ‘floor’

*Affricates*

The voiceless alveolo-palatal affricate /t͡ɕ/ is produced when the blade of the tongue touches the roof of the mouth in the alveolar ridge. It is heavily

palatalized; the middle of the tongue is raised towards the hard palate. It occurs only in the syllable initial position.

t͡ɕit ‘to tear’

The voiced alveolo-palatal affricate /dʑ/ is produced when the blade of the tongue contacts behind the alveolar ridge. It is heavily palatalized. Occurs only in the syllable initial position.

d͡ʑul ‘to lift’

*Fricatives*

The voiceless alveolar fricative /s/ is produced when the front of the tongue is placed near the front upper teeth and the blades are touching the alveolar ridge and air is released by a small opening. Occurs syllable initially in native words but can occur syllable finally in loan words.

sotmɑi ‘a fly’

itihas ‘history’ (Borrowed word)

The voiceless glottal fricative /h/ is produced when some air passes through the glottis with friction. Occurs only in the syllable initial position.

hurɑo ‘Hoolock gibbon’

*Trill*

The voiced alveolar trill /r/ is produced when the tip of the tongue nearly touches the alveolar ridge which creates vibration. Occurs both syllable initially and syllable finally.

*r`ŋsa* ‘one’

*kar* ‘to peel off’

*Appr`ximants*

The voiced lateral approximant /l/ is produced when the tip of the tongue touches the teeth ridge and air is passed through the sides of the tongue. It occurs both syllable initially and syllable finally.

lukwak ‘toad’

gɯl ‘strong’

The voiced labio-velar approximant /w/ is produced when the back of the tongue nearly touches the velum and the air flow is constricted but not to create turbulence. Occurs only in the syllable initial position.

wɑʔ ‘bamboo’

*2.2. V^wels*

Atong has six vowels, viz., /i/, /ɯ/, /u/, /e/,/o/ and /ɑ/.

*2.2.1. Overview Of At`ng V^wel Invent`ry*

The six vowels are listed in the table below:

***Table 11. Vowel Inventory***

Vowels

| | front | central | back |
|---|---|---|---|
| close | i | | ɯ |
| mid | e | | o |
| open | | ɑ | |

As we can see from Table 11, there are two vowels at the front, one in the central and three in the back. /i/ is close front unrounded and /e/ is mid front unrounded. /ɑ/ is open central unrounded. /ɯ/ is close back unrounded and /u/ is close back rounded. /o/ is close mid-rounded.

*2.2.2. V`wel Distributi`n*

The distribution of vowels in Atong are shown in the table below:

***Table 12. Vowel distribution***

| sounds | initial | | medial | | final | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| /i/ | ie | this’ | ɑin | law’ | ɑbi | ‘elder sister’ |
| /e/ | ek | ‘to separate’ | dapet | not tasty’ | mɯte | diety’ |
| /ɑ/ | ɑboŋ | maize’ | ʧɛɑnʔɑi | moon’ | hotɑ | to |
| /ɯ/ | ɯm | agree’ | bɯt | pull’ | ʧɛɯ | alcohol’ |
| /u/ | ue | there’ | bul | to stir’ | hapu | to blow’ |
| /o/ | ok | hunger’ | soʔot | to kill’ | golpo | story’ |

*2.2.3. V`wel C`ntrast*

The minimal pair for vowels are shown in the table below:

***Table 13. Vowel Contrast***

| close front and back vowels | | |
|---|---|---|
| /i/ | ie | ‘this’ |
| /u/ | ue | ‘there’ |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| /u/ | gul | ‘ t o |
| /ɯ/ | gɯl | ‘strong’ |

mid front and back vowels

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| /e/ | ek | ‘ t o |
| /o/ | ok | ‘hunger’ |

mid front and open central vowels

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| /e/ | *nek* | ‘close’ |
| /ɑ/ | nak | ‘black’ |

*2.2.4. V`wel Descripti`n*

*Fr`nt V`wels*

The vowel /i/ is a close front unrounded vowel produced when the tip of the tongue is raised and towards the hard palate with the lips spread. It is unrounded. Occurs in all positions.

ie ‘this’

diʔsu ‘piss’

abi ‘elder sister’

The front vowel /e/ is produced when the tip of the tongue is raised towards the hard palate with the mouth half open. The shape of the mouth is unrounded. Occurs in all word positions.

ek ‘to separate’

gebeng ‘width’

bie ‘which’

## Conclusion

The study focuses on the Segmental Phonology of Atong language. The phonemic inventory consonants and vowels are both explored, and all the individual phonemes are described, and how they are distributed. By looking at the analysis we can find out that Atong has a rich inventory of sounds. The patterns of these sounds are successfully addressed in the analysis. The study may provide researchers an insight for understanding of the language and further research in the language in the field of linguistics and hopefully for other fields as well. Due to the limitations during the study, only the phonology of the language is discussed. Further research in prosody, syntax, morphology, morpho-syntax, semantics, sociolinguistics, etc., could be done in the language. I hope this study provides potential for continued scholarly exploration.

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# A Preliminary Study of Sherpa Phonology[1]

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**Abstract**

This study investigates the phonological pattern of Sherpa, a Bodic language of the Tibeto-Burman family, spoken in Sikkim and North Bengal, India. Despite Sherpa's status as an endangered language, little research has focused on its Indian variety. Through fieldwork conducted in 2017-2018 across several Sherpa-speaking regions, this study aims to document the preliminary phonemic inventory of the language, contributing to its preservation. The phonological system includes 33 consonant phonemes, five vowel phonemes, and a tonal distinction between high and low tones. This paper provides a foundational resource for the phonological study of Sherpa in India, supporting the broader goal of documenting and preserving this endangered language.

## Introduction

This paper presents a phonological sketch of Sherpa based on fieldwork data collected in Sikkim and North Bengal region. It prepares a phonemic inventory of the Sherpa variety spoken in India. Sherpa can be described as 'people from the east' or 'people who live in the east.' The term is a compound word, combining the Sherpa[2] words syar /sjà:r/ meaning ‘east’ and pa /pà/ meaning ‘person’. The people of Sherpa in Sikkim trace their

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[22] The word ‘Sherpa’ refers to both the name of the community and its language.

migration story to Kham of modern Tibet. According to Joshua Project3, the Sherpa people are found in five countries with about 39000 people in India. Tenzing Norgay Sherpa, one of the first persons to ascend the world 's tallest mountain Mt. Everest in human history, is from the Sherpa community.

The population of Sherpa is found in Sikkim and North Bengal in India. According to the 2011 Language Census of India, there are 16012 persons who claim to be Sherpa speakers. Sherpa language consultant Passang Ongdup Sherpa from Upper Perbing, South Sikkim district estimated the Sherpa population in Sikkim and North Bengal area to be about 25000 in number. The Sherpa population in Sikkim is found in all four districts of Sikkim. They are settled in Perbing area of South Sikkim, Okharey area under Sombaria of West Sikkim, Phadamchen (Nimachen) area under Rongli sub division in East Sikkim and Kabi Tingda4 area under Mangan in North Sikkim. The population is mainly concentrated in the Sombare area of West Sikkim district.

The Sherpa community traditionally practices Buddhism. Day-to-day religious works are performed by lama, a spiritual Buddhist leader. A person is trained to become a lama in a monastery or gompa. Sherpas pray and meditate from gompa. Individual families also keep aside a place called chosem /tc$^{h}$òsèm/ in one portion of their house for religious activity. Sherpa believes in the existence of lhoyul (heaven) and nyelwa (hell).

Farming is a primary occupation for the Sherpa people, who grow cardamom, potatoes, maize, and various root vegetables, with maize being

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[3] A US based Christian Organization which attempts to among others coordinate missionary work around the world.

[4] In Kabi Tingda, however, the speakers are also known as Kagate group.

the most common. Nowadays, due to economic opportunities, many Sherpas also work in government positions, local businesses, or migrate to cities like Delhi. Sherpa festivals, reflecting Tibetan culture, include Losar (New Year) in February, Tukpa Tshezi celebrating the Four Noble Truths in July, and Lhabab Tuchen in November, marking Buddha's return from heaven.

*Ab`ut The Language*

The Ethnologue ISO code for the Sherpa language is 639-3 xsr, with no separate code distinguishing the Indian variety from the Nepalese variety. According to the 2011 Language Census of India, Sherpa is spoken by 16,012 individuals in India. Linguistically, Sherpa belongs to the Bodic group within the Tibeto-Burman language family. Bradley (1997) classified the Tibeto-Burman family into six major groups: Western Tibetan/Bodic, North East Indian, Kuki-Chin, Central TB, North Eastern, and South Eastern. He placed Sherpa under the Bodic group, further subdivided into the gTsang subgroup under Central Bodish (Bradley, 1997:3). Thurgood also classified Sherpa within the Bodic branch, specifically under the Central or U-Tsang Tibetan dialect (Thurgood et al., 2003:9). The Linguistic Survey of India, however, categorizes Sherpa within the Bhutia group under the Bodish language group (Mukherjee, 2013).

The language discussed in this paper is spoken in Sikkim and North Bengal, India. Varieties of Sherpa, such as Solu Khumbu Sherpa and Helambu Sherpa, are spoken in Nepal (Graves, 2007), where the Sherpa population is larger. Bradley (1997) estimated the global Sherpa population to be around 70,000, with the majority in Nepal, followed by India (mainly Darjeeling), and a smaller number in China. In Sikkim, Sherpa is spoken by approximately 20,000 to 30,000 people. While lexical differences exist

between villages, these do not cause major mutual unintelligibility. However, there is a notable dialectal difference between the Kabi Tingda variety in North Sikkim and other varieties from different districts. A section of the Sherpa population in Kabi Tingda is also known as Kagate. The 2013 Gazetteer of Sikkim classified Kagate as a separate Nepali community in the state (Kharel et al., 2013:121). Sherpa has been recognized as a state language of Sikkim since 1997 and is taught in certain government schools, such as Government High School, Perbing, in the Namchi subdivision of South Sikkim. Sherpa is written in Sambhota (Tibetan) script. School education materials are written in Sambhota/Tibetan script. Sambhota is used mostly by those who learnt it formally from Tibetan schooling or modern schooling. Due to technology and its easy access to it, Nepali (Devanagari) or Roman script is commonly used in writing on a daily basis among the Sherpa community members.

*Earlier Study*

Previous linguistic work done on Sherpa language of Indian variety is very scanty. Ganesh Baskaran (2013) under Linguistic Survey of India had done a sketch grammar featuring phonology and nominal system and some aspects of the sentence system of Sherpa. However, for the Nepal variety of Sherpa, there are noticeable linguistic works done. Some of them are Grammar of Hille Sherpa by Thomas Graves (2007) and a sketch grammar of Lamjung Yolmo by Lauren Gawne (2016). There are also a dozen books on Sherpa lexicon prepared by linguists and native speakers of Nepal (Tournadre et al, 2009). A recent study on the vitality of the Sherpa language was documented by Mataina in 2022.

*Data*

The main aim of the survey was to prepare a preliminary phonemic inventory of Sherpa which is an endangered language. On field data was collected by following the questionnaires compiled by the CEL. The questionnaire is based on language endangerment measuring scale adopted from UNESCO, GIDS (Fishman, 1991) EGIDS (Simon and Lewis 2013), and SPPEL Language Documentation Handbook (Bhattarcharya, Khrishna et al, 2016). Besides a formal interview with 31 members to gather data for the analysis, there were informal interactions with the several Sherpa community members. All the respondents were of age between 26 to 85 years old. The informants includes both genders, educated and uneducated, young and old, and people from different occupations such as housewives, farmers, ex-army men, government servant, social leaders, religious workers and teachers from Phadamchen area, under Rongli Sub-division of East Sikkim, Upper Perbing area under Namchi Sub-division of South Sikkim Okharey area, under Sombarey Sub-division, West Sikkim and Kabi Tingda, under Mangan sub division in North Sikkim between 2017 and 2018.

## Segmental phonology

The sound system of Sherpa has a relatively simple system. It may be classified into three major sound patterns as consonant, vowel and segmental features e.g., tone. Sherpa has thirty-three consonant phonemes, five vowel phonemes and two contrastive levels of tone.

*C`ns`nant Ph`nemes*

There are thirty-three consonants in Sherpa spreading over seven distinctive places and eight distinctive manners of articulation. These phonemes are

listed below in Table 1 below according to place and manner of their articulation.

***Table 1. Consonant phonemes***

| | **Bilabial** | **Alveolar** | **Post Alveolar** | **Retroflex** | **Palatal** | **Velar** | **Glotal** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Stop** | p b<br>$p^h$ | t d<br>$t^h$ | | ʈ ɖ<br>$ʈ^h$ | | k g<br>$k^h$ | |
| **Nasal** | m | n | | | ɲ | ŋ | |
| **Trill** | | r | | | | | |
| **Fricatives** | | s | | | ɕ ʑ | | h |
| **Affricate** | | ts $ts^h$<br>dz | tɕ $tɕ^h$<br>dʑ | | | | |
| **Liquids** | | l̥ (lh)<br>ɹ̥ (rh) | | | | | |
| **Approximant** | w | | | | j | | |
| **Approximant Laterals** | | l | | | | | |

*St`ps*

There are twelve stops /p, $p^h$, b, t, $t^h$, d, ʈ, $ʈ^h$, ɖ, k, $k^h$, g/ in Sherpa. The stops series occurs in four distinctive places of articulation: bilabial, alveolar, post alveolar, retroflex and velar. Voiceless unaspirated retroflex stop and voiceless aspirated stops occur in initial and medial positions, e.g. ʈálà

‘forehead’, láʈì ‘pumkin’, kʰìʈùk ‘puppy’. Except for retroflex stops, all stops occur in all positions. There is a limited free variation between bilabial stops /p/ and /b/, and between alveolar stops /t/ and /d/.

A minimal triplet for bilabial stops (voiceless, voiced, aspirated) in high and low tones is shown in Table 2 below. Voiceless alveolar stop and voiced alveolar stop are in limited word (especially grammatical particle) can act as free variants i.e they can substitute each other, e.g, gjàkpa~gjàkba ‘thick, dénpá~dénpá ‘true’.

***Table 2. Minimal set for bilabial stops***

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| p | pó | to unload |
| b | bò | to swell |
| pʰ | pʰó | there |

Table 3 below shows minimal triplet for stop alveolar onset (voiceless, voiced, aspirated) in low tones. Voiceless bilabial stop and voiced bilabial stop are also in limited lexemes that can act as free variants i.e they can substitute each other, e.g, mèntòk~mèndòk ‘flower’.

***Table 3. Minimal triplet for stops alveolar***

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| t | tá | horse |
| d | dà | catapult |
| tʰ | tʰà | web |

Table 4 shows a minimal triplet set for stop retroflex (voiceless, voiced, aspirated) in high and low tones.

***Table 4. Minimal triplet set for stops retroflex***

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| ʈ | *ʈì* | knife |
| ʈʰ | *ʈʰì* | seat |
| ɖ | *ɖì* | go |

Table 5 shows minimal triplet for velar stops on onset position in high and low tones.

***Table 5. Minimal triplet set for velar stops***

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| k | ká | pole |
| kʱ | kʰà | ice |
| g | gà | like |

*Nasals*

There are four nasal phonemes /m, n, ɲ, ŋ/. Except for nasal palatal /ɲ/, all the nasal sounds occur in all positions.

Table 6 and 7 show minimal pairs for /m/ and /n/, and /ɲ/ and /ŋ/ on the onset position in high and low tones.

***Table 6. Minimal pair for /m/ and /n/ for onset in low and high***

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| m | mè | fire |
| n | né | holy place |

***Table 7. Minimal pair for /ɲ/ and /ŋ/ on onset position in high tone***

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| ɲ | ɲá | fish |
| ŋ | ŋá | drum |

*Fricatives*

There are five fricatives sounds in Sherpa as /s, z, ɕ, ʑ, h/. All the sounds occur only word-initially. There is only one instance of voiceless alveolar fricative occuring in final position as in làs which is a shortened form of làsò 'OK' and occurs during fast speech. There is only voiceless glottal fricative, namely /h/. This glottal fricative occurs only in the initial position. Examples of glottal fricative /h/ are hònbà 'deaf' and hàriŋ 'today'

Table 8 and 9 show minimal pairs for /s/ vs /z/, and /ɕ/ vs /ʑ/ on onset position in high and low tones.

***Table 8. Near minimal pair for /s/ and /z/ on onset position in high and low tones***

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| s | sá | tooth |
| z | zò | build |

***Table 9. Minimal pairs for /ɕ/ and /ʑ/ on onset position in low tones***

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| ɕ | ɕì | die |
| ʐ | ʐù | bow |

*Affricates*

There are six affricate sounds articulated in alveolar and post alveolar regions. They are voiceless affricate alveolar /ts/, voiced affricate /dz/ and aspirated voiceless affricate alveolar /tsʰ/. In post alveolar series, they are voiceless affricate post alveolar /tç/, voiced affricate post alveolar /tçʰ/ and aspirated affricate post alveolar /d/.

These six affricate sounds occur word initially and medially.

Table 10 and 11 below show minimal sets for alveolar affricates and post alveolar affricates.

***Table 10. Minimal set for /ts, dz, ts tsʰ/ on onset position in high and low tones***

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| ts | tsá | root |
| tsʰ | tsʰá | salt |
| dz | dzà | fall |

***Table 11. Near minimal set for /tç, tçʰ, dʐ/ on onset positions in different tones***

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| tç | tçá | iron |
| tçʰ | tçʰá | manure |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| dz̩ | dz̩àk | tongue |

*Trill*

In sonorant sound class, there are trill, nasals (as discussed above), liquids and approximants. There is only one trill named alveolar trill /r/. It occurs in all positions. Examples of the trill are rà ‘goat’ and pʰár ‘increase’

*Appr`ximant*

There are two approximants and one lateral approximant namely bilabial approximant /w/, palatal approximant /j/ and alveolar lateral approximant /l/. So far, I observed that the bilabial approximant seems to appear initially only in two words which are wai ‘DECL’ and wártsʰe ‘to believe’ from the entire word list that is in my Sherpa corpus. Examples of bilabial and palatal approximants are given in (1) and (2) below:

1. dàwà ‘monday’
   kèwà ‘ladle’
   náwá ‘permission’
   rèwà ‘hope’
2. jáŋ ‘again’
   jò ‘handle of a knife’
   jàŋlà ‘candle’
   jàsìm ‘armpit’
   jàr ‘up’
   járbù ‘summer’

júŋmá ‘bamboo’

The lateral alveolar approximant /l/ occurs in all positions. The lateral approximant is always voiceless. Examples of lateral approximants are given example (3) below.

3. lám ‘road’

álà ‘many’

rùl ‘snake’

pérùl ‘excrement’

ʈéksúl ‘echo’

pàl ‘wool’

*Liquids*

There are two voiceless alveolar liquids /l̥/ and /ɹ̥/. As per this preliminary analysis, they seem to appear only in word initial. The voiceless alveolar liquids rhotic is more frequent than voiceless lateral alveolar liquids.

Table 12 shows minimal pair for two voiceless alveolar liquids /l̥/ and /ɹ̥/ in high tone.

***Table 12. Minimal pair for alveolar liquids /l̥/ and /ɹ̥/ in high tone***

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| l̥ | l̥á | god |
| ɹ̥ | ɹ̥á | hair |

*V`wel Ph`nemes*

With one central low vowel and two two front and back vowels each form the vowel phoneme inventory of Sherpa. Table 13 below shows the vowel

chart of Sherpa. Vowel lengthening is present in low back vowel /o/, e.g, ko: 'skin'. In the coda position of an open syllable, all vowels seem to be lengthened, e.g, bìkpà: 'swim', rímó: 'drawing'. However, in this analysis, this lengthening of vowels in open coda position is not taken as a vowel distinction. This is a common phenomenon in other languages as well. A related north east Indian language Liangmai also has such a manner in vowels, e.g, pá: 'read', kú: 'high, and pà: 'he/she'.

***Table 13. Inventory of Sherpa vowel phonemes***

| | |
|---|---|
| i | u |
| e | o |
| a | |

*Minimal pairs `f Sherpa v`wel*

Table 14 below shows minimal pairs and near minimal sets for Sherpa vowels. The minimal pairs on this table confirms the numbers of Sherpa phonemes.

***Table 14. Minimal pair of Sherpa vowel phonemes***

| | |
|---|---|
| i—e | pí 'ankle'<br>pè 'mouse' |
| a—e | pá 'vegetable'<br>pè 'mouse' |
| a—u | ràmbà 'a type of plant'<br>ràmbù 'strong |

| | |
|---|---|
| a—o | ákú ‘uncle’<br>ókù ‘chin’ |
| o—u | kò ‘cloth’<br>kú ‘command’ |

Table 15 below provides an overview of Sherpa phonemes, organized based on their occurrence and phonetic distribution within the language. The table includes all vowel sounds, each accompanied by illustrative examples, and highlights their frequency and contextual usage across various lexical items.

***Table 15. Sherpa vowel phonemes and their distribution***

| **Phoneme** | **Initial** | **Medial** | **Final** |
|---|---|---|---|
| /i/ | *ibi* wife elder sister<br>*íkú* hiccup | *tʲiŋ* plant<br>*tsiŋ* urine<br>*jìn* yes | *di* this<br>*ri* hill<br>*si* tell |
| /e/ | *eril* kind of fruit<br>*ermaŋ* pepper plant | *ser* gold<br>*set* kill | *te* yam<br>*pe* incense<br>*dze* |
| /a/ | *au* uncle<br>*ala* many<br>*aŋa* infant | *tsaŋ* thorn<br>*nam* sky<br>*pal* wool | *sa* tooth<br>*la* month<br>*kʰa* mouth |
| /o/ | *`ruŋ* we (pl)<br>*`msiŋ* kind of tree | *t`m* bear<br>*b`mbu* big | *j`* honeybee |

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| /u/ | *uru* | KT | *puŋba* | shoulder | *tsʰú* | water |
| | *usia* | hat | *duŋ* | spear | *lému* | good |
| | *úk* | breathe | *tsʰuma* | cow | *su* | who |

*Diphthongs*

There are four diphthongs in Sherpa. They are /au, ja, ju, jo/. The diphthongs in Sherpa occur in both monosyllabic and bisyllabic words. In a bisyllabic word, diphthongs seem to occur only on the first syllable. To ascertain the status of Sherpa diphthong, further investigation is required. Examples of diphthongs are shown in table 16 below.

***Table 16. Examples of diphthong in Sherpa***

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| /au/ | aú | 'uncle' |
| /jo/ | gjòp | 'to go' |
| /ja/ | gjàr | 'millet' |
| /ja/ | gjàtʰàp 'fire place' | |
| /ja/ | sjár | 'bloom' |
| /ju/ | gjùp | 'to beat' |

## Syllable Structure

The Sherpa syllable system consists of obligatory vowels, optional onset or coda and a tone. Consonant clusters in Sherpa may permit only on onset position. Table 17 below shows monosyllabic words and Table 18 below demonstrates bisyllabic words.

***Table 17. Monosyllabic words on V, VCV, VC, CV, CVC structure***

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| V | ú | to breathe |
| VC | íp | design |
| CV | dò<br>dza | stone<br>rainbow |
| VCV | álà | many |
| CVC | ŋúl<br>pár | silver<br>picture |

***Table 18. Bisyllabic words***

| | |
|---|---|
| pálàŋ | animal |
| páŋdèn | cloth (traditional) |
| ʈìmà | smell |
| tɕámbá | cold |
| kàmrèl | drought |
| rókrám | help |

*Consonant Cluster*

Two consonant clusters are permissible in Sherpa. Based on my database, the consonant cluster seems to occur only on onset position. Examples of consonant cluster are shown in Table 19 below:

***Table 19. Consonant cluster on the onset position***

| | |
|---|---|
| trák | rock |
| trókpà | landslide |
| trómbà | well |

## Tone

Sherpa has two register tones. They are high and low. The existence of contour tone seems to be present in my data but it has to be ascertained by further analysis. Examples of tone in Sherpa are demonstrated in Table 20 below.

***Table 20. Sherpa words showing high and low tones***

| | |
|---|---|
| kí ‘do’ | kì GENETIVE MARKER |
| ké ‘to give birth’ | kè ‘voice’ |
| nám ‘weather’ | nàm ‘when |
| sá ‘tooth’ | sa ‘to fall’ |
| là ‘month’ | là ‘group’ |

The following Table 21 further shows Sherpa language in monosyllabic and bisyllabic words and this confirms the existence of two level tones in Sherpa. A pitch trace (Praat picture) of júl ‘plaster (v)’ and jùl ‘village’ shows a difference of about 15 Hz. The pitch value of a high tone júl ‘plaster (v)’ is 145 Hz, while the pitch value of low tone jùl ‘village’ is 130 Hz as shown in Figure 1.

***Table 21. Examples of high and low tones in Sherpa in random words***

| HIGH | LOW |
|---|---|
| rì ‘hill’ | jùl ‘village’ |
| tɕá ‘iron’ | tsé ‘peak’ |
| tsʰám ‘elder’ | tsìŋ ‘urine’ |
| kʰá ‘pole’ | bà ‘goiter’ |
| tsáŋ ‘thorn’ | ràŋ ‘honey’ |
| áŋà ‘child’ | àràk ‘wine’ |
| gésér ‘ginger’ | bèlsàk ‘bamboo shoot’ |
| dérmaŋ ‘plate’ | dzàmlìŋ ‘earth’ |
| ŋíŋ ‘heart’ | bìn ‘miŋ’ |
| kádák ‘crow’ | kàkjàl ‘to cut’ |
| ŋá ‘drum’ | ŋà ‘five’ |
| kó ‘dig’ | kò ‘cloth’ |
| pémá ‘flower’ | pèmà ‘sand’ |
| sá land’ | sà ‘fall’ |
| sájá ‘itch’ | sájà ‘one million’ |
| lúk ‘put’ | lùk ‘sheep’ |

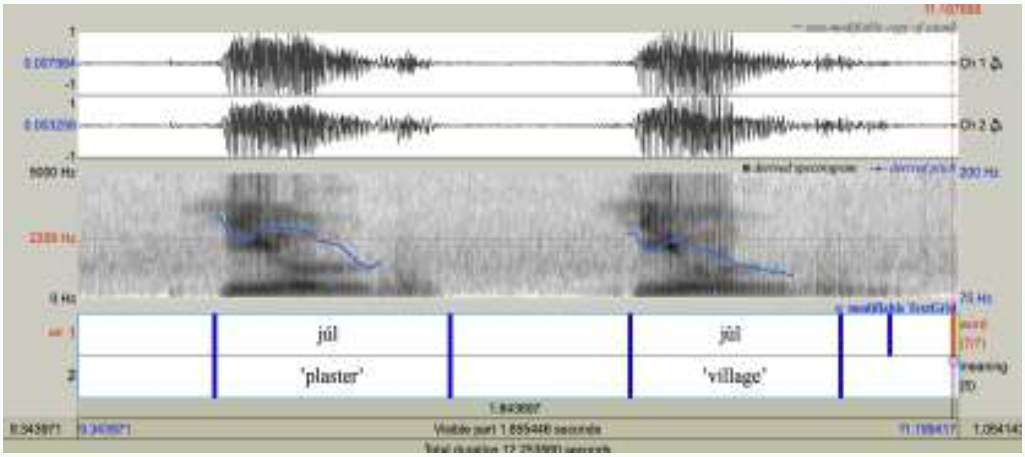


**Figure 1. Pitch trace of a high tone júl 'plaster (v)'. Voice of Karma Tenzing (32), Namchi**

## Conclusion

In this preliminary analysis, I examined the Sherpa sound system using data collected from Sikkim and North Bengal. The phoneme inventory of Sherpa, as presented in §2, includes thirty-three consonants and five vowels. While further research is needed, the current findings suggest that Sherpa has a tonal system with two contrastive level tones, as discussed in §4. The consonant system is characterized by seven manners of articulation and seven places of articulation. Both consonants and vowels can occur word-initially, while the consonants /p/, /k/, /m/, /n/, /ŋ/, /r/, and /l/ are also found in coda position. All vowels are attested in all phonological positions. The language permits consonant clusters of up to two consonants in the onset position, and the basic syllable structures are CVC or C(G)VC. This preliminary phonological study of Sherpa lays the groundwork for identifying additional phonological features, including phonological processes and suprasegmental characteristics. It is hoped that these findings

will contribute to the development of mother-tongue educational materials and aid in the creation of Sherpa orthography.

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# Phonotactics of Ri-Bhoi Amri Karbi

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## Abstract

Phonotactics can be defined as the principles in a language that restrict or allow the combination of sounds and sequencing of segments that form larger linguistic units such as syllables and words. Phonotactics form an integral part of the phonology of language; it helps understand the other aspects of language. Under phonotactics, linguistic structures such as syllable patterns, syllable canon, consonant clusters, consonant codas and onsets can be discovered. Ri-Bhoi Amri Karbi is a variety of Karbi or Mikir, majorly spoken in the Ri-Bhoi district of Meghalaya. It has eight types of syllable structures and follows the syllable canon pattern (C1) (C2) (V) (C3). The language has mostly monosyllabic root words. The smallest syllable is (V) and (CCVC) is the longest syllable pattern. In total, the language permits 10 types of consonant clusters, with /hɾ/ and /hl/, very rarely occurring clusters, being the unique ones that were discovered. Additionally, the language allows certain consonants at the onset and coda positions, /ŋ/ being the only consonant that cannot occur at the onset position. This work provides a preliminary overview of the phonotactics in Ri-Bhoi Amri Karbi. It presents the principles that form the structures of syllables and other linguistic units in the language.

## Introduction

Karbi is a tribal community residing in the state of Assam, also historically known by the name mikir, a name considered to be given by the Assamese, but the term is no longer preferred by the Karbi people. Instead, they choose the term Arleng, which carries the meaning of ‘the Karbi man’, or most commonly only Karbi. The Karbis speak the Karbi language in the regions of Assam, especially in the largest district of the State i.e., Karbi Anglong,

with Diphu being the headquarter. The Karbis were originally known to have migrated from the Tibetan regions, sharing home with the other Tibeto-Burman-speaking communities. They entered India and resided in Assam. It is believed that these communities, including the Karbis, had inhabited western China near the Yang-Tee-Kiang and the Howang-ho rivers and moved from there following the courses of the Brahmaputra, the Chindwin and the Irrawaddy finally reaching India. Unfortunately, it is not possible to trace the origin and history of the people due to a lack of written documents or evidence. It is only through their folktales, folksongs, and folklores that one can gain some knowledge about their origin.

According to the Census of India 2011, Karbi has more than 5,28,503 speakers. The language is mainly spoken in two states, Assam and Meghalaya. Within Assam, Karbi Anglong has the highest number of speakers, followed by the Kamrup district. It is also spoken in the north Cachar Hills, Nagaon, and Morigaon. A good number of speakers reside in the Ri-Bhoi and Jaintia Hills districts of Meghalaya.

The Karbis speak the Karbi language, which belongs to the Tibeto-Burman language family. However, the classification of the language within the family sparks inconsistencies. There are varying classifications proposed by different people where the Karbi language is placed. Robbinson and Needham (1855) have classified the Tibeto-Burman family and placed Mikir under the Kachin group, amongst other languages such as Kuki-Naga, Meitei and Mru. Grierson, in 1903, had classified it along with the Naga languages. According to him, the language is an intermediate stage between the true Naga languages and those belonging to the Bodo group. He claimed that it belongs to the same group as the Naga languages such as Kachcha

Naga, Kabui, and Khoirao. While Scott DeLancey, in 1989, placed Mikir under the Kamrupan Baric group in the family along with Meitei. In the year 1998, Robbins Burling proposed a new classification where Karbi is included as a separate branch under the Eastern Area (see Figure 1).

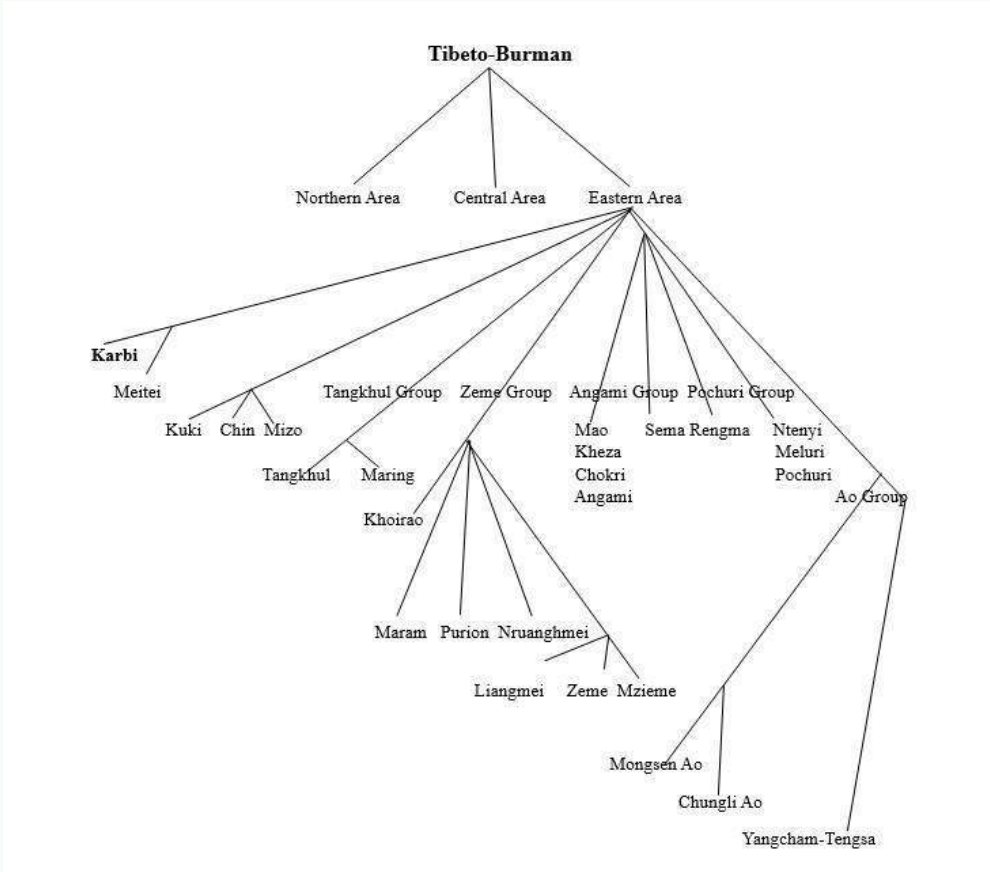


**Figure 1. Robbins Burling's classification of Tibeto-Burman Languages**

The Karbi language can be divided into two varieties, the Hills Karbi and the Plains Karbi. The Hills Karbi typically refers to the variety spoken in Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong and the Plains Karbi is spoken in the plains of Assam, particularly in Kamrup district, Basbitha, Jalukbari, Chandubi, Jorabat, Kahi Kusi, Khetri, Loharghat, Pandu, Panikhaith, Rani block, Sonapur, and the southern part of the Brahmaputra River, and

Morigaon of Assam, and Ri-Bhoi district, Nongpoh area, Barni Hat and Umling of Meghalaya as listed by the Ethnologue. Grierson (1903) referred to the Karbi speaking community in Meghalaya as Bhoi Mikir.

The Hills and the Plains Karbi show linguistic differences with respect to the phonology, morphology, and syntactic structure. One of the notable differences in the phonology is the presence of the alveolar lateral /l/ in the coda position in the Amri Karbi which is absent in the standard. There are also variations in the tones, in that while the standard has lexical contrasts according to the difference in the tones, the Amri Karbi apparently makes no such distinctions in the lexicons.

## Methodology And Analysis

The place of the study was at Umrang village which is located at Umrang, Rongkru Branch Nongpoh, Ri-Bhoi district, Meghalaya. The time of the study was conducted for two interviews at the village's head's residence and each interview took about three to four hours. The dates of the interviews are March 3rd and 12th, 2023.

This study used a descriptive approach and employed elicitation, interview and questionnaire method, where the informants were questioned on the spot and the data was collected and copied on the notebook. The transcriptions as well as tone markings were done during the interviews. The voices were recorded on the phone and the recordings were later used to verify and confirm whether the sounds were accurately transcribed.

Before taking the interviews, the SPPEL-CIIL questionnaire and list of words were prepared in a notebook and A4 size papers. Later, while the data were being collected, modifications and changes of the list were made

as and when required. The hand-written data were then copied into Microsoft Excel Worksheet for analysis. A total of 835 words were collected from the basic vocabulary list comprising of the following semantic domains: Body parts, animal body parts, kinship terms, birds and animals, insects and aquatic animal terms, fruits and vegetables, household and religious items, colour terms, numbers, music and performance, adornments and clothing, earth, nature and universe, food and diseases, directions, time, days and week, categories such as verbs, adjectives, conjunctions, interrogatives, pronouns, and also simple and complex sentences etc. Vocabulary under the domains of professions, transportation, sports and games, and expressive.

The informants of this study were three native speakers, one young woman, a man, and an older man, of the Amri Karbi in Umrang, Ri-Bhoi district. The ages of the informants range from the mid-20s to the 50s. The voices of two of the informants were recorded after getting their oral consent. They have resided in the native village since birth and are well-versed in their native language. They are also fluent in other languages such as Khasi and English. For the analysis of the data, the software Phonology Assistant was used and for phonetic analysis, Praat software was also utilized.

**Literature Review**

One of the earliest linguistic studies attempted in the Karbi language was Grierson's Linguistic Survey of India (1903) Vol. III, Pt. II, where he provided a brief insight into the phonology and syntax of the language. He found that the Karbi or Mikir language has the following consonant sounds: b, ch, d, h, j, k, l, m, n, ng, p, r, s, t, v, kh, ph, and th. The sounds bh, dh, and

g only occur in some borrowed words and the sound ng does not occur in the initial position. He also made a reference to Mr. Stack's study who found that the language has the vowel sounds a, e, i, o, and u, and the diphthongs ai, ei, oi, and ui.

Jeyapaul's in his Karbi Grammar (1987) gave a grammatical sketch of the language. According to his research findings, there are 32 phonemes, out of which 29 are segmentals (24 consonants and 5 vowels) and 3 are suprasegmentals (high, low and mid tones).

Konnerth in her book A Grammar of Karbi (2020) has done an exhaustive study on the grammar of the Karbi language. She has also given a broad description of the varieties of the language, classified and compared them concerning their linguistic and regional differences. She firstly affirms that the Karbi language remains the same throughout, despite the scattering, as also put forward by Walker. There is, however, a division (both political and linguistic) between the Hills Karbis (Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong) and the Plains Karbis (Plains of Assam- North of West Karbi Anglong). There is little dialectal variation to be found. Konnerth considers two dialect labels from the Hills Karbi variety- the Rongkhang or Ronghang dialect- used as the basis for standardization; the Hills Amri Karbi dialect spoken in West Karbi Anglong. In her book, the onset consonant clusters she found are, /pl/, /pr/, /pʰl/, /pʰr/, /tʰr/, /kl/, /kr/, /kʰr/. Both open a nd closed syllables can either have no consonant onset, a single consonant onset or a cluster onset. The bilabial stops occur most productively in clusters: both voiceless stops, the unaspirated /p/ and aspirated /pʰ/ occur with both rhotic /pʰr/ and lateral /pʰl/. She also found that the Karbi language has the

following syllable patterns, V, VC, CV, CVC, CCV, CCVC. In Karbi, most of the roots and affixes are monosyllabic.

A comprehensive study of the phonology of the Amri Karbi language was also worked on by Gope and Sarmah in their work Preliminary Description of Amri Karbi Phonology (2012). According to Gope's findings, in the study of the Amri Karbi in the Kamrup district, Assam, there are 19 consonants and five vowels in the Amri Karbi language. All the consonants occur word-initially. In both word-initial and word-final positions /d/ and /g/ have limited occurrence. They hardly occur in inter-vocalic positions. The syllable types found are V, CV, CVC, CCV, CCVC.

Phillipova has done an extensive study on the Amri variety and made remarkable findings in A Grammar of Amri Karbi (2021). Amri Karbi has 23 consonants or phonemes, 5 full and marginal vowel phonemes. The syllable types found by Philippova are V, VV, CV, CVV, CCV, VC, VVC, CVC, CCVC. Only liquids appear as a second consonant in a cluster. Monosyllabic roots are attached with prefixes/suffixes/compounds. The consonant clusters occur in this manner: the first consonant in a cluster is usually stops, glottal /h/, and the second consonant is rhotic or lateral. All clusters occur syllable-initially only /pr/, /pl/, /kr/, /kl/, /pʰr/, /pʰl/, /kʰr/, /hr/, and /hl/.

## Consonant And Vowel Phonemes In Ri-Bhoi Amri Karbi

*Consonants*

The Amri Karbi spoken in the Umrang village of Ri-Bhoi district, Meghalaya has in total of 21 consonants. There are 11 stops /p pʰ b t d tʰ k kʰ c ɟ ʔ/, 5 fricatives /β ɸ s ʃ h/, 3 nasals /m n ŋ/, and 2 approximants, flap /ɾ/ and lateral /l/. The labio-dental fricative /v/ and the palatal glide /j/ are in

brackets since they occur as free variations with the phonemes /β/ and /ɟ/ respectively.

***Table 1. Consonant phonemes***

| | Bilabial | Labio-dental | Alveolar | Post-alveolar | Palatal | Velar | Glottal |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Stop | p b<br>$p^h$ | | t d<br>$t^h$ | | c ɟ<br><ch><br><j> | k<br>$k^h$ | ʔ |
| Fricative | ɸ β | (v) | s | ʃ | | | h |
| Nasal | m | | n | | | ŋ | |
| Liquid (lateral) | | | l | | | | |
| Liquid (rhotic) | | | ɾ | | | | |
| Glide | | | | | (j) | | |

The voiced stops /b/ and /d/ are also marginal at the coda position. They frequently take the onset position in a word but rarely at the coda. Minimal pairs for the bilabial fricative /ɸ/ and the post-alveolar fricative /ʃ/ were not

found since their occurrence in the sound system is very rare. It is assumed that these sounds are a result of the influence or borrowing from neighbouring languages such as Assamese.

*Vowels*

The vowels, on the other hand, consist of four front vowels /i/, /a/, /e/, /ɛ/, and three back vowels /u/, /o/ and /ɔ/. /ɛ/ and /ɔ/ are marginal vowels.

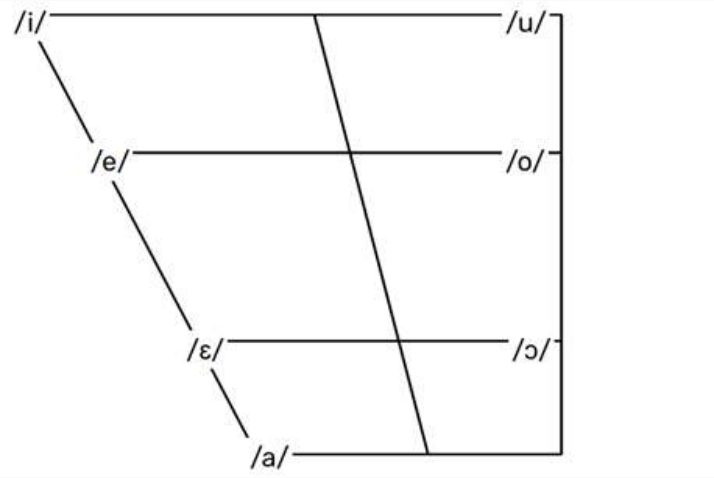


**Figure 2. Vowel chart**

In the analysis of the vowels, /ai/ is the only diphthong that was found. Philipova had found two of them, /ai/ and /ei/ with /ei/ frequently occurring in borrowed words from Assamese. However, /ei/ is totally absent in the variety spoken in Ri-Bhoi. /ai/ occurs only as open syllables and mostly in the word final position.

**Phonotactics In Ri-Bhoi Amri Karbi**

It deals with the syllable structure, syllable canon, consonant clusters, and consonant codas.

*Syllable Structure*

Ri-Bhoi Amri Karbi syllables allow 8 types of syllable patterns. They are shown in the table below.

***Table 2. Syllable pattern***

| CV pattern | Word | Gloss |
|---|---|---|
| V | /ɛ/ | 'to plant' |
| VV | /ai/ | 'mother' |
| CV | /pi/ | 'to give' |
| CCV | /kri/ | 'tear' |
| CVV | /tʰai/ | 'place' |
| VC | /ɔm/ | 'cheek' |
| CVC | /mek/ | 'eye' |
| CCVC | /kraŋ/ | 'high' |

The root words in the language are commonly monosyllabic. The roots are attached with common prefixes such as i- '1', a- 'POSS' and suffixes. Many syllables have one or two consonants before the nucleus CCV. Many syllables have only one consonant (closed syllables) following the nucleus. In open syllables, the onset consonant can have a nucleus with a diphthong CVV.

**Syllable Canon**

When syllables coalesce, it results in the creation of new finals and clusters and it affects in forming of the syllable canon in the language as given below:

(C1) (C2) (V) (C3)

The minimum syllable structure is V, a single vowel, as in the word / i/ meaning 'to sleep'. In the case of a cluster, the first consonant is usually the stops /p pʰ b t k/ and very rarely the fricative /h/. The second consonant is commonly the liquids /l ɾ/. If it is an open syllable, there may be one consonant or a cluster, (C1) (V) or (C1) (C2) (V), and one or two vowels i.e., a diphthong. However, a cluster of consonants cannot have a diphthong; it is only possible with one consonant. In a closed syllable, there is a third consonant which may be any of the consonants that can occur in the coda position.

***Table 3. Open syllables***

| Open syllables | Gloss | Syllable structure |
|---|---|---|
| re | 'wise' | CV |
| kʰai | 'community' | CVV |

***Table 4. Closed syllables***

| Closed syllables | Gloss | Syllable structure |
|---|---|---|
| dam | 'to walk' | CVC |
| pʰlɔk | 'to take off' | CCVC |

*Consonant Clusters*

Consonants are clustered only in the onset or syllable-initial position and the number of consonants that can form a cluster is up to two. Thus, it can have a cluster pattern such as CCV, or CCVC. The list of the possible clusters is given below. It is usually the voiceless stops that occupy the first consonant in a cluster. The only voiced first consonant is the voiced bilabial stop /b/.

The rhotic or the lateral occurs as the second consonant. The only aspirated consonant in a cluster is the voiceless aspirated bilabial stop /pʰ/. /tʰ/ is not a cluster; the only words for the cluster are kretʰrok ‘seventeen’ and tʰroksi ‘seven’ are derived from the root word tʰorok ‘six’. The rather unusual clusters are /hl/ and /hr/ which do not occur very often. /hl/ is found only in one instance, kaŋhlek ‘to lick’ and /hr/ is found in three words, hrek ‘louse’, kihrɛŋ ‘to live’ and kapahrɛŋ ‘to rescue or save’.

***Table 5. Consonant clusters***

| Consonant clusters | Word | Gloss |
|---|---|---|
| /pɾ/ | kiprɛk | ‘to be different’ |
| /bɾ/ | debbra | ‘left’ |
| /kɾ/ | kretʰɔm | ‘thirteen’ |
| /pʰɾ/ | kikɔmpʰrɔt | ‘to cover’ |
| /pl/ | pleŋ | ‘complete’ |
| /bl/ | kʰabla | ‘thigh’ |
| /kl/ | aklɛŋ | ‘elder’ |
| /pʰl/ | kipʰlak | ‘to chop’ |
| /hɾ/ | kihrɛŋ | ‘to live’ |
| /hl/ | kaŋhlek | ‘to lick’ |

*Consonant onsets*

Except for the velar nasal /ŋ/, all the consonants occur in the onset position. The consonants /v/ and /j/ are in free variation with /β/ and /ɟ/ respectively. They occur freely in the onset position irrespective of the environment i.e.,

the sounds preceding or following them. /ɸ/ and /ʃ/ are marginal consonants whose occurrence is rare in the sound system.

*Consonant Codas*

The stops /p b t d k/, nasals /m n ŋ/ and liquids /l ɾ/ can appear word-finally, except /pʰ tʰ kʰ c ɟ/ and /h ɸ β ʃ/. The consonants /b/ and /d/ rarely occur in the coda position. Minimal pairs for the stops could not be found perhaps due to insufficient data; therefore, near-minimal words are shown.

***Table 6. Stops codas***

| Stops | Word | Gloss |
|---|---|---|
| _ p | tʰɛp | ‘ t o p l a y ( a n |
| _ b | dab | ‘morning’ |
| _ t | hɛt | ‘ago’ |
| _ d | bɛd | ‘leprosy’ |
| _ k | tʰɛk | ‘able’ |

***Table 7. Nasals codas***

| Nasals | Word | Gloss |
|---|---|---|
| _ m | *mum* | ‘beard’ |
| _ n | *mun* | ‘finger’ |
| _ ŋ | *muŋ* | ‘to smoke’ |

***Table 8. Liquids codas***

| Liquids | Word | Gloss |
|---|---|---|
| _ l | kɔl | 'to blame' |
| _ ɾ | kɔɾ | 'to bite' |

**Summary and conclusion**

Karbi is a language spoken in both the hills and plains. While the Rongkhang variety is considered as the standard dialect for the Karbi community as a whole, there are varieties of the language spoken in different districts of Assam as well as in the state of Meghalaya. The hills Karbi use the standard dialect while the varieties are used by the plains. The plains Karbis refer to the people residing in the district of Kamrup in Assam and the Ri-Bhoi district of Meghalaya. These varieties are heavily influenced by their neighbouring languages such as Assamese and Khasi. The plains Karbi differs from the standard Karbi in many levels, i.e., in the level of phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics.

In the study of Ri-Bhoi Amri Karbi phonotactics, it is found that there are 8 types of syllable patterns: V, VV, CV, CCV, CVV, VC, CVC, and CCVC. In the syllable structure, the first consonant is usually the stops / p $p^h$ b t b k/. The second consonant is commonly liquids /l ɾ/. Besides that, there is also/h/ as the first consonant which is not very common in the language. The syllable canon can be given as (C1) (C2) (V) (C3). In an open syllable, there is only one or two consonants as a cluster, (C1) (V) or (C1) (C2) (V) and one or two vowels (diphthong). However, a consonant cluster cannot have a diphthong. Consonants in the language can be clustered in ten ways: /pɾ/, /bɾ/, /kɾ/, /$p^h$ɾ/, /pl/, /bl/, /kl/, /$p^h$l/, /hɾ/, /hl/. /hɾ/ and /hl/ are very unique

clusters that can only be found in some words. All the consonants can occur in the onset position, except the velar nasal /ŋ/. The stops /p b t d k/, nasals /m n ŋ/ and liquids /l ɾ/ can appear word-finally. However, /pʰ tʰ kʰ c ɟ/ and /h ɸ β ʃ/ cannot.

## Abbreviations

SPPEL-CIIL Scheme for Protection and Preservation of Endangered Languages- Central Institute of Indian Languages

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# Tense and Aspect in Langa Variety of Yimkhiung

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## Abstract

The aim of this article is to describe the tense and aspect of Langa, the standard variety of Yimchunger, which belongs to the Sino-Tibetan group of the Tibeto-Burman language family, spoken in the hill state of Nagaland in North East India. Yimchunger changed its nomenclature from 'Yimchunger' to 'Yimkhiung' on the 8th of September, 2021. The president of the Yimkhiung Tribal Council (YTC) stated that Yimchunger was a "mispronunciation or misspelt term" while discussing the origins and pronunciations of Yimkhiung. The president of Yimkhiung Tribal Council further stated that, "the purpose behind rectification was to give an appropriate connotation even if it was simply a matter of correcting the spelling." (Official Declaration Ceremony of Yimkhiung | Nagaland Post, 2021.). Therefore, Yimchunger will now be referred to as Yimkhiung throughout the article. According to the Census Report (2011), there are 83,259 Yimkhiung speakers. Yimkhiung is classified into six major varieties namely: Langa, Tikhir, Chirr, Mükok, Longphur and Phunung. Out of the six varieties, Langa is the standard variety, spoken in the Tuensang district of Nagaland, while the rest of the varieties are spoken in the Kiphire district of Nagaland. The present work focuses only on the Langa variety.

### An Overview Of The Yimkhiung Naga Tribe

Yimkhiung Naga (previously known as Yimchunger) is a major tribe of Nagaland. The Government of Nagaland changed the nomenclature of "Yimchunger" Naga to "Yimkhiung" Naga through a notification after the state cabinet authorised the change on July 31, 2021. The official change in nomenclature was declared on September 8, 2021 (Official Declaration Ceremony of Yimkhiung | Nagaland Post, 2021). The president of

Yimkhiung Tribal Council stated that Yimchunger was a "mispronunciation or misspelt term" while discussing the origins and pronunciation of Yimkhiung. He mentioned that, “It is not a change in nomenclature, but rather a correction of the spelling from Yimchunger to Yimkhiung. For all official reasons, the community was known as Yimchunger.” Although it was only a question of fixing the spelling, the community unanimously decided to rectify it in 2016, and the Cabinet authorised it on July 31, 2021. The president of YTC further stated that, "the purpose behind rectification was to give an appropriate connotation even if it was simply a matter of correcting the spelling." (Official Declaration Ceremony of Yimkhiung | Nagaland Post, 2021). Thus Yimchunger will be henceforth referred to as Yimkhiung.

The Yimkhiungrü tribe has inhabited Eastern Nagaland since time immemorial. Essentially, the group is said to have migrated from South East Asia. However, nothing further is known since no written history has been able to establish it. The exact migration route is also unknown. Whatever the history may be with regard to migration, many of the blood brothers of the tribe live in the Western region of Burma or Myanmar today. Due to expanding populations and searches for new pastures, some Yimkhiungrüs have established villages and now live in the Dimapur area in western Nagaland. These are known as the western Yimkhiungrüs. Therefore, there is a diaspora of Yimkhiungrüs living in eastern Myanmar and Dimapur areas (“About Yimkhiung Tribe-Yimkhiungrutruk”, n.d.). Geographically, the Yimkhiungrüs are surrounded by the following Naga tribes on the mainland: the Burmese in the East, the Konyaks and the Khiamniungans in the north east, in the northwest are the Changs and the Western Sangtams, the Sumis

in the West, the Eastern Sangtams in the Southwest, and Pochury tribe in the South. ("About Yimkhiung Tribe-Yimkhiungrutruk", n.d.). It is believed that the Yimkhiungrüs and Khiamungans migrated together from Upper Burma to present-day Nagaland in one wave. The two groups separated at Moru village, according to Yimchunger tradition (YIMCHUNGER | District Tuensang, Government of Nagaland | India).

Yimkhiung is classified into six major varieties namely: Langa, Tikhir, Chirr, Mükok, Longphur and Phunung. Out of the six varieties, the Langa variety is the standard variety (About Yimkhiung Tribe-Yimkhiungrutruk, n.d.).

## Phonemic Inventory of the Yimkhiung

This section describes the speech inventory of the Yimkhiung. There are altogether 30 speech sounds in Yimkhiung, out of which 23 are consonants and 7 are vowels (Raguibou & Borah, 2020). The speech sounds of Yimkhiung closely resemble the sounds of other central Naga languages such as Sangtam and Ao.

*Consonants*

According to Bruhn (2014), Yimkhiung has 26 consonantal sounds, which are divided into seven plosives /p, ph, t, th, k, kh, ʔ/, four nasals /m, n, ɲ, ŋ/, two flaps /r, ɾ̥/, six fricatives /f, s, z, ʃ, ʒ, h/, four affricates /ts, tsh, ʧ, ʧh/, two approximants /w, j/, and one lateral /l/.

In a recent study by Raguibou & Borah (2020), Yimkhiung has 23 consonantal sounds, which are seven plosives /p, ph, t, th, k, kh, ʔ/, four nasals /m, n, ɲ, ŋ/, one flap /r/, five fricatives /s, z, ʃ, ʂ, h/, three affricates /ts, ʧ, dz, two approximants /w, j/, and one lateral /l/. The phonemic consonants

of Yimkhiung are represented in the following table 1 according to the manner and place of articulation.

***Table 1. Phonemic consonants of Yimkhiung***

| | Bilabial | Labio-Alveolar | Post-Alve | Retroflex | Palatal | Velar | Glottal |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Plosive | p<br>pʰ | t tʰ | | | | k<br>kʰ | ʔ |
| Nasa | m | n | | | ɲ | ŋ | |
| Flap | | r | | | | | |
| Fricative | | s<br>z | ʃ | ʂ | | | h |
| Affricate | | ts | ʧ ʤ | | | | |
| Approxim | w | | | | | | |
| Later | | l | | | | | |

*Vowels*

According to Bruhn (2014), there are 6 vowels in Yimkhiung, which are divided into high front unrounded vowel /i/, mid-high unrounded vowels /e/, low front unrounded vowel /a/, central mid vowel /ə/, high back rounded vowel /u/ and mid-high rounded vowel /o/.

As per Raguibou & Borah (2020), Yimkhiung has 7 vowels, which are divided into high front unrounded vowel /i/, mid-high front unrounded vowel /e/, low front unrounded vowel /a/, central mid vowel /ə/, high back unrounded vowel /ɯ/, high back rounded vowel /u/, and mid-high back rounded vowel /o/. The vowels in Yimkhiung are represented in the following chart according to their point and manner of articulation.

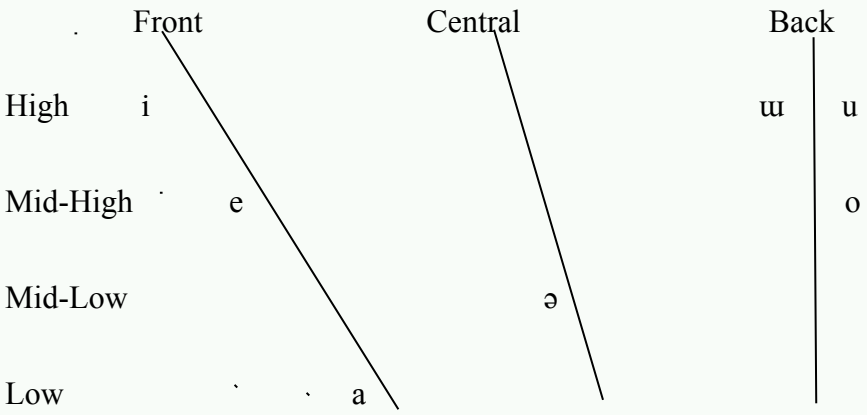



***Chart 1. Vowel chart of Yimkhiung***

**Tones**

Yimkhiung, like many other Tibeto-Burman languages, is a tonal language. There are three distinct tones that can be identified in Yimkhiung. They are mid-rising [˧˥], high-falling [˥˩] and low-falling [˩˩]. All three tones of a word are represented in the following table 2.

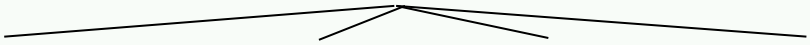
***Table 2. Tones of Yimkhiung (Ragibou & Borah, 2020)***

| **Mid- rising** | **High falling** | **Low-falling** |
|---|---|---|
| ʧi↿ ‘mithun’ | ʧi↾ ‘barking’ | ʧi↿ ‘hundred’ |
| puŋ↿ ‘bloom’ | puŋ↾ ‘male’ | puŋ↿ ‘cup’ |
| | | |
| ruk↿ ‘uproot’ | ruk⅂ ‘similar’ | ruk↿ ‘tax’ |
| tre↿ ‘fear’ | tre↾ ‘fair’ | tre↿ ‘female’ |
| mɯzɯŋ↿ ‘to stretch’ | mɯzɯŋ↾ ‘heal’ | mɯzɯŋ↿ ‘person’ |

**Genetic Classification Of Yimkhiung**

Tibeto-Burman is one of the four major language families found in South East Asia. Yimchunger (now known as Yimchiung) belongs to the Sino-Tibetan group of the Tibeto-Burman language family. According to Burling (2003), Yimchunger belongs to the Ao group of Kuki-Naga sub-group of the Tibeto-Burman language family. It is spoken in some parts of the Tuensang and Kiphire districts of Nagaland. Bradley (1997) has classified Yimchunger under the Kuki-Chin-Naga sub-group of the Tibeto-Burman language family. According to the Census Report (2011), there are 83,259 Yimchunger speakers.

**Eastern Border Area**



**Ao Group** **Angami-Pochuri Group** **Zeme Tangkhul**

Yacham-Tengsa Rengma N Nruanghmei Tangkhul

Ao-Chungli Pochuri Puiron Maring

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Ao-Mongsen | Rengma | Khoirao |
| Sangtam | Sumi | Zeme |
| Yimchunger | Angami | Mzieme |
| Lotha | Chokri | Liangmai |
| | Kheza | Mar |
| | Mao | |

**Figure 1. The genealogical classification of Yimkhiung by Burling (2003).**

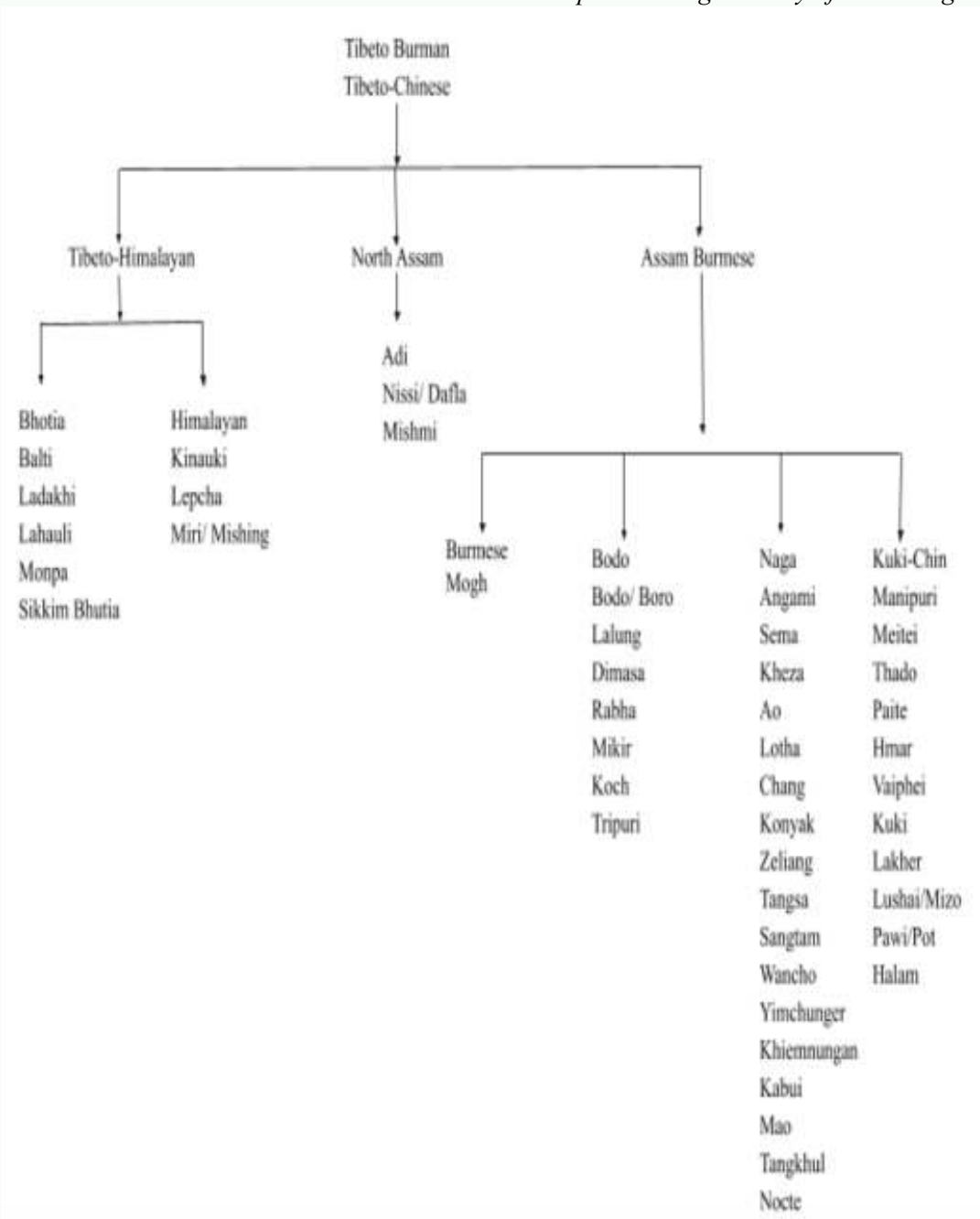



**Figure 2. Classification of Tibeto-Burman (DeLancey, 1987).**

## The Notion Of Tense And Aspect In Langa

*Tense in Langa*

Tense as a grammatical category is present in Langa. The concept of tense is contextually derived in the language, however morphologically there is no marker for present tense. The grammatical tense that manifests itself morphologically in the verb phrase is the past and future tense. Tense in Langa happens post-verbally, as it does in most head final languages.

***Table 3. Tense system in Langa***

| Tense | Tense in Langa |
|---|---|
| Past | -kʰi |
| Present | Ø |
| Future | -pa |

*Present Tense*

Present tense in Langa is not morphologically marked. It is represented by the zero morpheme –Ø in the following analyses. The verb take the variants of the allomorph -laʔ and -aʔ of the declarative marker. Sentences (1) to (4) show the verbs taking the declarative marker.

1. alipe-nɯ iŋliʃ anikhit-laʔ

   3SgF-ERG english understand-DEC

   ‘She understands English’

2. nɯ-nɯ aren mɯrɯʔ-laʔ

2Sg-ERG aren like-DEC

‘ You like Aren’

3. i-nɯ nɯ muzho-laʔ

1Sg-ERG 2Sg love-DEC

‘I love you’

4. aniʔpu apə ʧu amijə-rɯ-aʔ

3SgM mother be white-NOM-DEC

‘His mother is American’

*Past Tense*

Langa has –khi as the past tense marker suffixed to the verb. Sentences (5) to (8) exemplifies the past tense markers in Langa.

5. jɯni i khepuŋ-lim wɯ-khi-aʔ

yesterday 1Sg school-DAT go-PST-DEC

‘I went to school yesterday’

6. ahopə amukhip i-nɯ nɯ ŋɯ-khi-aʔ

last week 1Sg-ERG 2Sg see-PST-DEC

‘ I saw you last week’

7. i atrɯp-khi-aʔ

1Sg cry-PST-DEC

‘I cried’

8. alipe-nɯ pinʃaŋkhoŋpe ahori-khi-aʔ

3SgF-ERG guitar play-PST-DEC

‘She played the guitar’

*Future Tense*

Future tense is the only grammaticalized overt marker in Langa. The future tense marker in Langa is –pa followed by the declarative -ʔ, both suffixed to the verb. It occurs post-verbally. In the following sentences (9) to (14) the future marker -pa is overtly marked post-verbally. However, in sentences (15) to (17), it may be noted that the future marker -pa is not marked, as the sentences are in negative construction, one can understand the context of future event without the use of future tense marker.

9. ʃito arɯ ʃhiʔkitməkhəpe ahori-pa-ʔ

tomorrow 3PL football play-FUT-DEC

‘They will play football tomorrow’

10. ʃito i ɹukɹinpuŋ-ʧiŋ wɯ-pa-ʔ

tomorrow 1Sg market-LOC go-FUT-DEC

‘I will go to the market tomorrow’

11. i ɹim tsɯ-pa-ʔ

1Sg food eat-FUT-DEC

‘I will eat food’

12. alɯm-nɯ i-ɲo loluŋpe tsakham-pa-ʔ

alem-ERG 1Sg-POSS car make-FUT-DEC

'Alem will fix my car'

13. i aɲap-pa-ʔ

1Sg sleep-FUT-DEC

'I will sleep'

14. isa tsɯmɲukʃiʔkit ahori-pa-ʔ

1PL basketball play-FUT-DEC

'We will play basketball'

15. athrəpɯ ʃito akhepoŋ-lim mɯ-wɯ

3SgM tomorrow school-DAT NEG-go

'He will not go to school tomorrow'

16. alipe ʃito ma-rɯ

3SgF tomorrow NEG-come

'She will not come tomorrow'

17. isa ɲukɲinpuŋ-lim mɯ-wɯ

1PL market-LOC NEG-go

'We will not go to the market'

**Aspect In Langa**

Langa has aspect as a grammatical category reflecting the temporal distribution of a situation as it pertains to time. This section describes the aspectual system present in Langa.

Langa distinguishes two types of grammatical aspect, i.e. perfective and imperfective, which are considered to be the most fundamental distinction of aspect. Imperfective aspect is further sub-divided into progressive and habitual aspect.

Based on the analysis of the grammatical aspect in Langa, the presence of grammatical features to mark perfective and imperfective aspect are of the following types, illustrated in Table 4.

***Table 4. Aspect system in Langa***

| Aspect | Aspect markers |
|---|---|
| Perfective | -to |
| Progressive | -tʃo and -te |
| Habitual | kamrɯʔroro and apan |

*Perfective aspect*

The general categorization that the perfective aspect denotes a completed event is found in Langa. The perfective aspect marker in Langa is -to. Perfect aspect indicates completion of an event. The perfective marker occurs post-verbally in a sentence.

–to as a Perfective marker

The perfective marker –to is found in Langa to indicate completed events. Sentences (18) to (23) exemplifies the perfective marker -to.

18. i-nɯ kihɯm phɯji thrɯt-to-ʔ

    1Sg-ERG letter four write-PFV-DEC

    'I have written four letters'

19. i-nɯ tekhiʔ-to-ʔ

    1Sg-ERG cook-PFV-DEC

    'I have cooked'

20. athrəpɯ kaku khə-to-ʔ

    3SgM book read-PFV-DEC

    'He has read a book'

21. athrəpɯ ɟap-to-ʔ

    3SgM sleep-PFV-DEC

    'He has slept'

22. alipe ahoripu tso-to-ʔ

    3SgF play go-PFV-DEC

    'She has gone to play'

23. isa-nɯ isa-ɟo thɯɟam tsakam-to-ʔ

    1PL-ERG 1PL-POSS house build-PFV-DEC

    'We have built our house'

Langa has another perfective marker that denotes an action which has been carried out completely and thoroughly. The completive perfective aspect is marked by the use of a completive marker –kham- that is suffixed to the verb and prefixed to the perfective marker -to. Sentences (24) to (26) illustrate the completive action.

24. i ʧim tsɯ-kham-to-ʔ

1Sg food eat-COM-PFV-DEC

'I have finished the rice'

25. i rhimo-kham-to-ʔ

1Sg work-COM-PFV-DEC

'I have completed the work'

26. arɯ-nɯ pinpoŋ tsa-kham-to-ʔ

3PL ERG chair repair-COM-PFV-DEC

'They have repaired the chair'

*Imperfective Aspect*

Imperfective in Langa expresses the event that is not completed. The event in the imperfective aspect is viewed as not bounded, unlike the perfective aspect in which the event or situation is bounded. In Langa the imperfective can be subdivided into progressive and habitual aspects.

*Progressive Aspect*

In Langa, the progressive marker is indicated by -ʧo and –te, denoting activities that are incomplete and in progress at the time of speech. The progressive markers -ʧo and –te are suffixed in the verb.

*-ʧo as a Progressive marker*

The progressive marker -ʧo is suffixed to the verb to denote an event that is still in progress at the time of speech. It is used to indicate the present progressive aspect in Langa. Sentences (27) to (30) show the present progressive aspect marker in Langa.

27. i rhimo-ʧo-ʔ

    1Sg work-PROG-DEC

    'I am working'

28. i ʤim tsɯ-ʧo-ʔ

    1Sg food eat-PROG-DEC

    'I am eating food'

29. alipe ʧu atampɯ phət-ʧo-ʔ

    3SgF be floor sweep-PROG-DEC

    'She is sweeping the floor'

30. athrəpɯ ʧu atakpəsaŋ chənak-ʧo-ʔ

    3SgM be firewood chop-PROG-DEC

    'He is chopping firewood'

–te *as Future Progressive marker*

The progressive marker –te is used in future progressive constructions. When a situation indicates progressive future, the progressive marker –te is followed by the auxiliary marker la- which is prefixed to the future marker –pa. Sentences (31) to (33) exemplifies progressive future construction.

31. i ʤim tsɯ-te la-pa

1Sg food eat-PROG Aux-FUT

'I will be eating food'

32. arɯ khɯn tsə-te la-pa

3Pl song sing-PROG Aux-FUT

'They will be singing'

33. alipe alaŋ-te la-pa

3SgF wait-PROG Aux-FUT

'She will be waiting'

–te *as Past Progressive marker*

The marker –te is also used to indicate past progressive events. The marker –te is suffixed to the verb and followed by the auxiliary marker la- prefixed to the past marker –khi. Sentences (34) to (36) illustrate the past progressive events.

34. athrəpɯ ʧu tsɯŋrereroro jap-te la-khi-aʔ

3SgM be night whole sleep-Prog Aux-PST-DEC

'He was sleeping all night long'

35. thia anirɯ khia-te la-khi-aʔ

tia sibling look-Prog Aux-PST-DEC

'Tia was babysitting his sister'

36. kɯjimki thiuʃak so-khiaʔ i-nɯ kaku khe-te la-khi-aʔ

when news hear-PFV 1Sg-ERG book study-Prog Aux-PST-DEC

'I was studying when I heard the news'

*Habitual Aspect*

Habitual aspect in Langa denotes activities that are repetitive, distributed over a period of time and duration. It is marked by the lexical kamrɯʔroro 'always' and apan 'every'.

kamrɯʔroro *as a habitual marker.*

Habitual aspect can be lexically marked in Langa. The repetition of an event or situation marked by the lexical item kamrɯʔroro 'always' occurs pre verbal. kamrɯʔroro as a habitual aspect can be exemplified in the sentences (37) to (41).

37. i kamrɯʔroro ɟap-ʧo-ʔ

1Sg HAB sleep-PROG-DEC

'I always sleep'

38. athrəpɯ kamrɯʔroro mokhɯɲiaŋ duk-ʧo-ʔ

3SgM HAB cigarette inhale-PROGDEC

'He always smokes'

39. i kamrɯʔroro ke ɟuŋ-ʧo-ʔ

1Sg HAB water consume-PROG-DEC

'I always drink water'

40. aʃuŋ kamrɯʔroro amukʰuŋ wɯ-ʧo-ʔ

ajung HAB church go-PROG-DEC

'Ajung always goes to church'

41. isa kamrɯʔroro rukkʰɯʔ a-kʰepuŋ ʧiŋ wɯ-ʧo-ʔ

1PL HAB together NRL-school LOC go-PROG-DEC

'We always go to school together'

*apan as a Habitual marker*

The lexical item apan meaning 'every' denotes a situation or an event that is repeated and occurs pre verbal. Sentences (42) to (44) show the habitual marker apan.

42. i ɹapsɯ apan paŋ miʔ-ʧo-ʔ

1Sg morning HAB body bath-PROG-DEC

'I take bath every morning'

43. i nimoŋ apan arelim atsaʔpɯ wɯ-ʧo-ʔ

1Sg day HAB evening walk go-PROG-DEC

'I go for evening walk every evening'

44. alipe ɹapsɯ apan saŋkə ɹuŋ-ʧo-ʔ

3SgF morning HAB tea consume-PROG-DEC

'She drinks tea every morning'

**Findings and Conclusion**

The analysis of the data shows that tense is weak in Langa. Aspect as a grammatical category of marking the different time intervals is a predominant feature in Langa. From this study, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. There is no overt morphological marking for present tense in Langa. The tenses that can be distinguished in Langa are the past and future tense which is denoted by the marker –khi and –pa respectively, it occurs post-verbally. Therefore, it can be understood that tense is weak in Langa.

2. Langa distinguishes two types of grammatical aspects, that is, the perfective and imperfective aspect. The aspectual markers in Langa occur in post-verbal position, except for habitual aspect which occur pre-verbal.

3. Perfective aspect is marked by –to.

4. In Langa there is another completive perfective aspect marker to express actions or events that have been thoroughly completed. The completive marker is denoted by -kham-, suffixed to the verb and prefixed to the perfective marker –to.

5. Imperfective aspect in Yimkhiung is further subdivided into progressive and habitual aspect. Progressive is marked by -ʧo and –te, the present progressive aspect is marked by -ʧo.

6. The past progressive aspect is marked by the progressive marker –te, affixed to the verb followed by the auxiliary la- prefixed to the past marker -khi.

7. The future progressive is indicated by the progressive marker –te, affixed to the verb followed by the auxiliary la- prefixed to the future marker –pa.

8. Habitual aspect in Langa is marked by the lexical kamrɯʔroro 'always' and apan 'every'.

Based on the analysis of tense and aspect, it can be concluded that the tense system in Langa is relatively weak. Langa is an aspect-prominent language, as it conveys certain temporal distinctions that cannot be expressed solely through tense. Thus, the category of Aspect plays a more significant role than Tense in expressing time in Langa. In conclusion, this study has focused exclusively on the tense and aspect systems within the Langa variety of Yimkhiung. This leaves room for further research, which future local linguists and researchers can pursue to deepen our understanding of the language.

**List of Abbreviations and Symbols**

| | |
|---|---|
| 1Sg | First person singular |
| 1PL | First person plural |
| 2Sg | Second person singular |
| 2PL | Second person plural |
| 3Sg | Third person singular |

| | |
|---|---|
| 1Sg | First person singular |
| 3PL | Third person plural |
| 3SgF | Third singular female |
| 3SgM | Third singular male |
| ABL | Ablative |
| ADJ | Adjective |
| ALL | Allative |
| Asp | Aspect |
| AspP | Aspect phrase |
| Aux | Auxiliary |
| AuxP | Auxiliary phrase |
| COM | Completive |
| DAT | Dative |
| DEC | Declarative |
| DOC | Degree of comparison |
| ERG | Ergative |
| FUT | Future |
| GEN | Genitive |
| HAB | Habitual |
| INFL | Inflectional |
| INST | Instrumental |
| LOC | Locative |
| MOC | Marker of comparison |
| NEG | Negative |
| N | Noun |

| | |
|---|---|
| 1Sg | First person singular |
| NP | Noun phrase |
| NRL | Non-relational prefix |
| NUM | Numeral |
| PFV | Perfective |
| PL | Plural |
| POSS | Possessive |
| PROG | Progressive |
| PST | Past |
| QM | Question marker |
| Spec | Specifier |
| T | Tense |
| TP | Tense phrase |
| V | Verb |
| VP | Verb phrase |
| Ø | Null |

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# Preliminary Analysis of Voice Onset Time in Idu-Mishmi

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## Introduction

Idu-Mishmi is a Sino-Tibetan language spoken in the Dibang Valley of Arunachal Pradesh, India. With an estimated 11,000 speakers, Idu-Mishmi faces significant endangerment primarily due to socio-political and economic factors. The influence of prestige languages such as Arunachali, Hindi and English, coupled with the Hindi-based education system, has contributed to a gradual decline in the transmission of Idu-Mishmi across generations. As a result, younger speakers are increasingly adopting Hindi or English. Despite its cultural and linguistic significance of the language, there are limited empirical studies on the language. Some existing materials on the language include descriptive analysis of the phonology, morphology, and syntax of the language (Bench et. al, 2017; Blench et. al, 2018). Although a limited number of instrumental studies has been conducted for Phonetic analysis of the language, a recent study (Kaland et. al, 2021) has explored the acoustic realizations of lexical tones in the language.

Idu exhibits an interesting range of consonants and variations. For instance, selected consonants show modifications by aspiration, rhotacization, labialization and prenasalization (Blench et. al, 2017). However, there is no instrumental study on the phonetic realizations of these stop consonants. As an initial step, this study investigates the Voice Onset

Time (VOT) of the voiced and voiceless stop consonants, along with their modified counterparts.

Voice Onset Time (VOT), initially proposed by Lisker & Abramson (1964), is a measure used to describe the timing difference between the release of a stop consonant and the onset of voicing. VOT can be positive or negative. Positive VOT refers to a delay between the release of the stop and the onset of voicing, which is usually observed in voiceless stops like /p/, /t/, and /k/.

Negative voicing indicates that voicing starts before the release of the stop. Negative VOT is relatively rare in English but can occur in voiced stops in other languages. For example, in languages like Dutch, Spanish, Hungarian and Tamil, negative voicing is observed in voiced stops (Lisker & Abramson,1964). However, VOT is not a widely studied property in the Sino-Tibetan language family.

A phonological description of Idu Mishmi provided by Blench et al. (2017) reports that the language exhibits significant variability across speakers in the articulation of consonants. This in turn makes it difficult to resolve allophony in the language. The set of phonemes and the provisional description of the allophones given in Blench et al. (2017) is presented in Table 1.1. Apart from the aspirated voiceless stops, the stops which can be rhotacized are /p$^{r}$/, /p$^{hr}$/, /b$^{r}$/, /t$^{r}$/, /t$^{hr}$/, /d$^{r}$/, /k$^{r}$/, /k$^{hr}$/ and /g$^{r}$/. Additionally, the stops which can get labialized are /p$^{w}$/, /p$^{hw}$/ and /b$^{w}$/. However, due to the low frequency of occurrence of most of these modified stop sounds, our data set does not cover all of them. The stop sounds considered for this analysis are: /p/, /t/, /k/, /k$^{h}$/, /t$^{h}$/, /p$^{w}$/, /p$^{r}$/, /b/, /d/, /g/ and /b$^{r}$/.

***Table 1. Consonants of Idu Mishmi from Blench et al. (2017)***

| **Place** | **Bilabial** | **Alveolar** | **Retroflex** | **Palato-alveolar** | **Palatal** | **Velar** | **Glottal** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Plosive** | p, $p^h$ | t, $t^h$, d | | | | k , $k^h$, | ʔ |
| **Fricative** | | s, $s^h$ [z] | [ʂ] | [ʃ] | | | h |
| **Affricate** | | [ t s ] [dz] | | ʧ , $ʧ^h$ [ʤ] | | | |
| **Nasal** | m | n | | | ɲ | ŋ | |
| **Tap** | | r | | | | | |
| **Lateral** | | l | ɭ | | | | |
| **Approximants** | w | | ɽ | | y | | |

## Methods

*Speakers*

The data was recorded from one male and one female native speaker of Idu-Mishmi. Both speakers were between 30 to 35 years of age and fluent speakers of Idu-Mishmi.

*Material and procedure*

A list of 1000 words were randomly selected for this analysis. The audio recording setup involved using a Sennheiser CX 80S Wired noise-canceling microphone. A sampling rate of 44kHz was chosen, and offline recording was implemented because of the low-connectivity setting. During the session, the participant was first presented with the Idu Mishmi word paired with its corresponding English translation to provide contextual understanding. This presentation took place within a web application custom built by the author running locally on the author's laptop. The participant then pronounced the Idu Mishmi word three times consecutively within a 7-second timeframe.

## Analysis

For the current study, the words with word initial stop consonants were analyzed. The selected sound files were then analyzed in Praat (Boersma et al., 2001), by manually marking the VOT for each stop. A waveform and spectrogram showing an example of a positive VOT and a negative VOT is shown in Figure 1 and Figure 2 respectively.

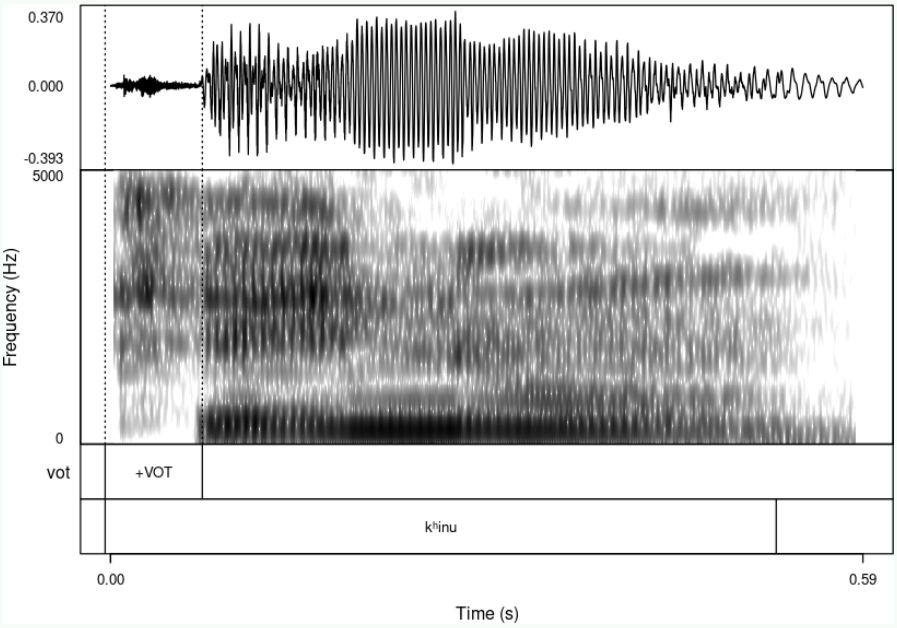


***Figure 1. Example of a positive VOT marked with spectrographic evidence***

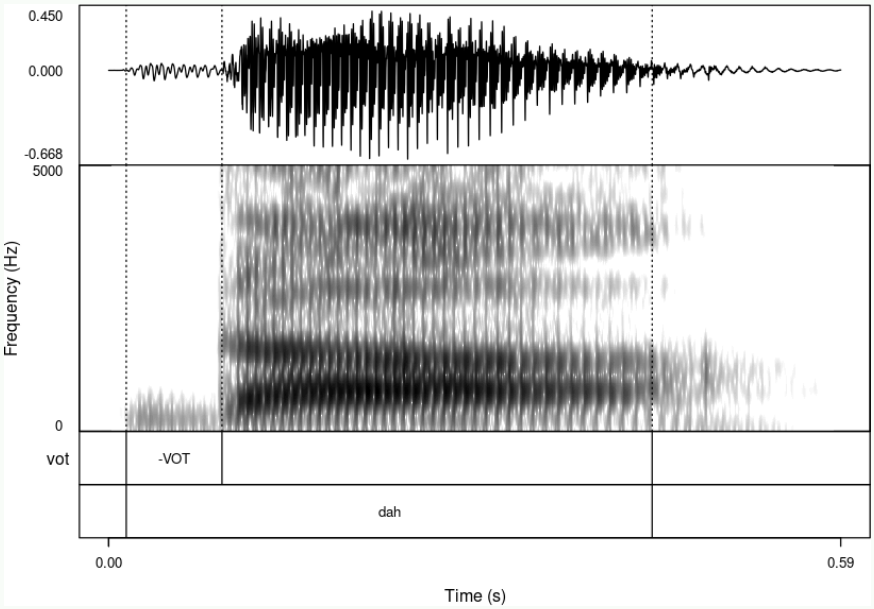


***Figure 2. Example of a negative VOT marked with spectrographic evidence***

The number of tokens for each type of stop consonants are provided in Table 2.

***Table 2. Number of tokens for each type of stop***

| **Voiceless stops** | **Count** | **Voiced stops** | **Count** |
|---|---|---|---|
| k | 24 | b | 4 |
| $k^h$ | 10 | $b^r$ | 3 |
| p | 14 | d | 8 |
| $p^w$ | 2 | g | 5 |
| $p^r$ | 7 | | |
| t | 15 | | |
| $t^h$ | 12 | | |

## Results

The VOT measures of voiced and voiceless stops are plotted in Figure 3. Although this study is conducted with limited data, the preliminary analysis shows that within the voiceless stops, aspirated segments show much longer VOT compared to unaspirated segments. However, all unaspirated voiceless stops show similar VOT patterns. On the other hand, rhotacized bilabial voiced stop /$b^r$/, show longer VOT compared to all other voiced stops /b/, /d/ and /g/.

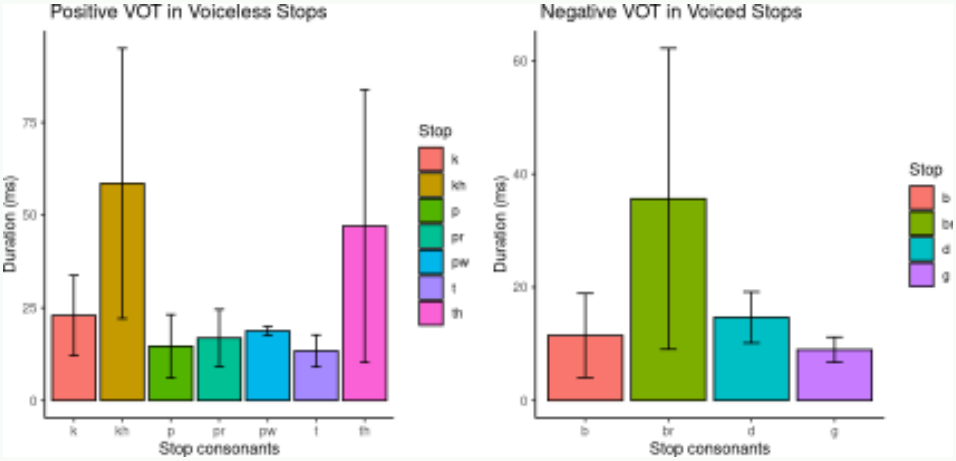


***Figure 3. Mean duration of VOT (with standard deviation bars) of voiced and voiceless stops in Idu-Mishmi***

## Discussion

This study presents a descriptive analysis of VOT measures in some of the voiced and voiceless consonants of Idu Mishmi. As this analysis is performed on a limited quantity of data, the goal of this study is an initial observation of the existing pattern. These results would be generalizable across the language after statistical analysis on a larger dataset. However, from the results, it is observed that the VOT pattern of the aspirated and unaspirated stops correspond to the VOT patterns observed in languages with a two way distinction between aspirated and unaspirated stops (Abramson and Whalen, 2017), that is aspirated stops display a longer VOT compared to unaspirated stops. Another interesting observation that calls for further analysis is that the rhotacized stops show considerable differences in the VOT as the voiced stop /b$^{r}$/ show much longer VOT compared to the voiceless counterpart /p$^{r}$/. Therefore, a future direction of research would be

to analyze how rhotacization affects the temporal features of the stop consonants.

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# Language in a Multilingual Setting: A Case Study of Yimkhiung

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## Abstract

Multilingualism is not rare but a common phenomenon and a normal necessity due to globalization and wider cultural communication. This paper will acquaint the readers with the forms, appearance, and key features of multilingualism. The study is carried out through surveys, questionnaires, and interviews as the primary source. A total of 100 respondents took part in the study. It is conducted to examine language attitudes, language usage across various domains, preference, and extent of multilingualism. Nagaland is a diverse state and multilingual by nature. We look into how Creole and globalization are influencing the Yimkhiung students, the impact it has while learning their Mother tongue, and analyze the effects of it at different levels of domain. It is found that there was an impressive positive response concerning their attitude toward their Mother Tongue. Different languages are used in different domains; Mother Tongue is used in Home domain, English is used in the Educational domain, and Nagamese is used in the workplace. The students prefer Mother Tongue as their comfort language and the use of other languages in different settings depending on the situation.

## Introduction

With nearly 7,000 languages spoken worldwide, multilingualism is a common phenomenon (Lewis, 2009, as cited in Cenoz, 2013). The existence of these languages side by side has given rise to multilingualism, which emerges from the need to communicate across different speech communities. Multilingualism is not rare but rather a common necessity across the world, driven by globalization and broader cultural exchanges. Haugen (1956)

refers to multilingualism as "a kind of multiple bilingualism." It can be defined in two ways: maximal competence, where speakers are equally proficient in all their languages, and minimal competence, where speakers are able to communicate effectively in a particular domain, even if their proficiency varies across languages.

The need for multilingualism arises from communicative functions such as in-group communication, out-group communication, and specialized communication. Members of certain ethnic groups may communicate in one language, but no speech community exists in isolation. As a result, speech communities or individuals are often in regular contact with other groups, creating the need for out-group communication. During this process, individuals may switch from one language or variety to another.

Sociolinguistics deals with language in its social contexts and thereby studies the varieties spoken by subgroups based on geographical region, ethnicity, age, educational background, or even occupation. The common theory in sociolinguistics is “we are what we speak”. The language we use gives us a sense of identity and place (Wolfram and Shilling-Estes, 2006).

Haokip (2009), talks about the linguistic diversity in the Northeast states which not only indicates the spatial distribution of various linguistic groups but also reflects the ethnocultural mosaic of the region with a mixed and varied population of diverse linguistic groups, each with a distinct culture, lifestyle, and heritage.

According to Elwin (1961), “in earlier days, men and women in the same household sometimes had to use different forms of speech.”

Traditional languages in the region often lacked their own scripts and instead used the Roman script introduced by Christian missionaries. The North-East states, distinct from the rest of India, are highly linguistically and ethnically heterogeneous, with most inhabitants speaking Tibeto-Burman languages. This region displays remarkable linguistic diversity. Bilingualism and multilingualism are common in both rural and urban areas.

Language has become more than just a means of communication; it has become a cultural and identifying feature of people. When discussing the role of a common language in the process of globalization, it is worth mentioning the term lingua franca, which refers to a language used by people who speak various native languages. In Nagaland, due to the linguistic complexity of the region, a pidgin language—Nagamese—was created as a lingua franca for everyday communication, now considered as a creole. The development of a lingua franca requires constant contact between different groups of people, and the Nagas are no exception. They maintained regular contact with the neighboring state of Assam through the barter system. Being naturally multilingual, the Nagas have experienced both positive and negative influences as a result of these interactions.

Let us look into the context of the Yimkhiung community. Yimkhiung is one of the non-scheduled languages of India spoken mainly in Nagaland and the North Eastern states of India. According to the 2011 census, the community stands at a strength of 83,259.

The objective of the study was to examine the domain of language use and analyze the language preference of the Yimkhiung speakers in a multicultural setting. Random sampling was taken from Yimkhiung students

residing in an urban area. An empirical/observation method was applied during the study along with primary and secondary sources.

The key informants will play a major role in identifying the following:

a) Which language is widely spoken at home?

b) Which language is widely spoken in society?

c) What is the dominant language in society?

d) Which language commonly functions as a lingua franca at the inter-community level?

Singh (2001) suggests a typology of possible domains in the context of South Asia. According to him there are 12 possible domains, such as: ghar (home domain), sthaaniya (local or native domain), samuudayik (community domain), praadeshik (state domain), raastriya (national domain), kaaryaalagiin (official domain), rajniitik sansthaan (political organization), dhaarmik (religious domain), aanusthaanik (ritual domain), saikshhanik (institutional domain), yaataayaat-sambandhi (traveling domain) and duur sanchaarii (mass media).

In the context of Yimkhiung community 6 domains will be discussed- ghar (home domain), kaaryaalagiin (official domain), samuudayik (community domain), dhaarmik (religious domain), saikshhanik (institutional domain), and duur sanchaarii (mass media).

The study was carried out in Showuba Village located in Kuhoboto circle of Dimapur district in Nagaland, India. The questionnaire was created and distributed to the students through offline and online (google forms and Whatsapp). Part I of the questionnaire contained the background information

of the respondents and part II of the questionnaire studies the language preferences of the respondents at different domains.

***Table 1. Age of the respondents***

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Valid | 15-21 | 9 | 9.0 | 9.0 |
| | 22-30 | 38 | 38.0 | 38.0 |
| | 31-40 | 17 | 17.0 | 17.0 |
| | 41-50 | 22 | 22.0 | 22.0 |
| | 50 and above | 14 | 14.0 | 14.0 |
| | Total | 100 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

The age group given in the table 1 above, out of 100 respondents, 38% of the respondents are between 22-30 years, 22% are from the age group of 41-50 years, 17% respondents are from the age group of 31-40 years, 14% respondents are from the age group of 50 years and above, and 9% from the age group of 15-21 years. We can see that the highest number of respondents was from the age group between 22-30 years followed by the age group of 41-50 years.

***Table 2. Sex***

| | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent |
|---|---|---|---|

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Valid | Male | 47 | 47.0 | 47.0 |
| | Female | 53 | 53.0 | 53.0 |
| | Total | 100 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

From the table 2 above it can be seen that out of 100%, the majority were female respondents' with 53% and male with 47%.

***Table 3. Period of residence***

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Valid | 0-15 years | 36 | 36.0 | 36.0 |
| | 16-30 years | 37 | 37.0 | 37.0 |
| | 30-50 years | 21 | 21.0 | 21.0 |
| | 50 years and above | 6 | 6.0 | 6.0 |
| | Total | 100 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

In our survey on the period of residence in Showuba Village, the largest group, comprising 37% of respondents, reported having lived in the village for 16-30 years—a moderately long duration. The next largest group, at 36%, has resided in the village for 0-14 years. Meanwhile, 21% have lived

in the village for an extended period of 30-50 years, and a small portion, 6%, have been residents for over 50 years.

***Table 4. Mother Tongue***

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Valid | Yimkhiung | 100 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

The mother tongue of the respondents of Showuba Village is 100% Yimkhiung as given in the table 4. We can see that the data collected is solely from the Yimkhiung speakers as per the table.

***Table 5. Other languages***

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Valid | Nagamese | 17 | 17.0 | 17.0 |
| | English | 12 | 12.0 | 12.0 |
| | Nagamese and Hindi | 1 | 1.0 | 1.0 |
| | Nagamese and English | 27 | 27.0 | 27.0 |
| | English and Hindi | 5 | 5.0 | 5.0 |
| | Nagamese, English and Hindi | 38 | 38.0 | 38.0 |
| | Total | 100 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

Table 5 above, apart from Yimkhiung as their mother tongue, 38% of them can speak Nagamese, English, and Hindi, 27% can speak Nagamese and English, 17% of Nagamese, 12% English, 5% English and Hindi, and 1% Nagamese and Hindi. Through this table we see that the community is multilingual and monolingual speakers are not found.

**Education**

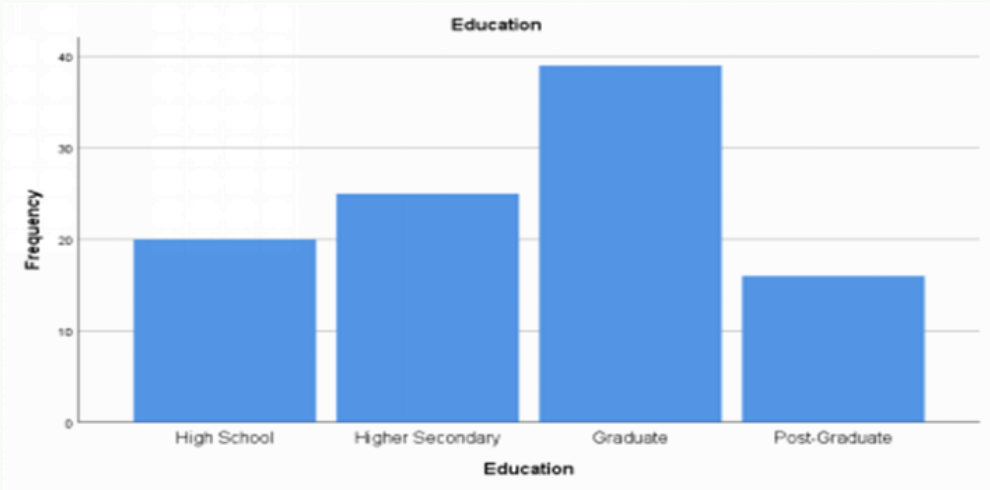


***Figure 1. Education***

Figure 1 above shows that out of 100 respondents 39% are graduates, 25% have completed higher secondary level, 20% have completed their high school and 16% of them are post graduates. Through this we can say that the literacy rate of the youths in Showuba Village is high.

**Language Use At Home Domain**

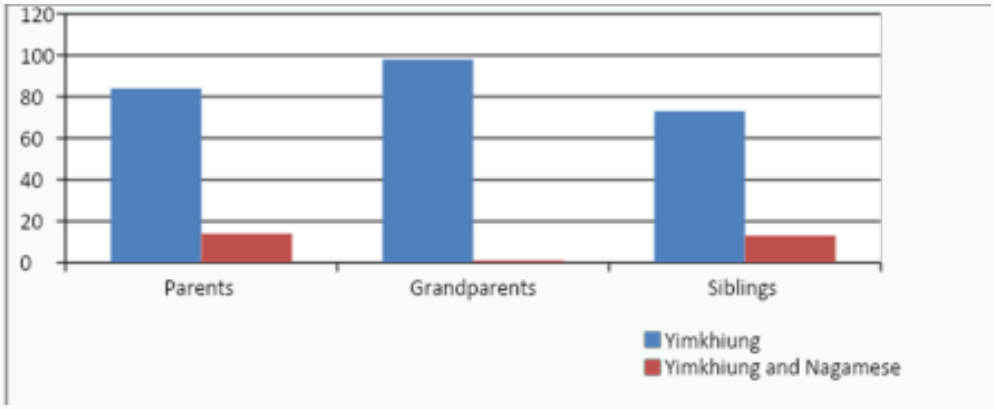


**Figure 2. Home Domain**

In the home domain, as illustrated in Figure 2 above, 84% of speakers use their native language when speaking with their parents, 98% converse in their mother tongue with their grandparents, and 73% use Yimkhiung when talking with their siblings. The remaining percentages indicate the use of both Yimkhiung and Nagamese with parents, grandparents, and siblings, primarily due to inter-tribal marriages.

**Official Domain**

At the official domain such as the Yimkhiung Tribal Council, student bodies, and church organizations uses Yimkhiung for all official communications.

**Language Use At Community Level (native village & community)**

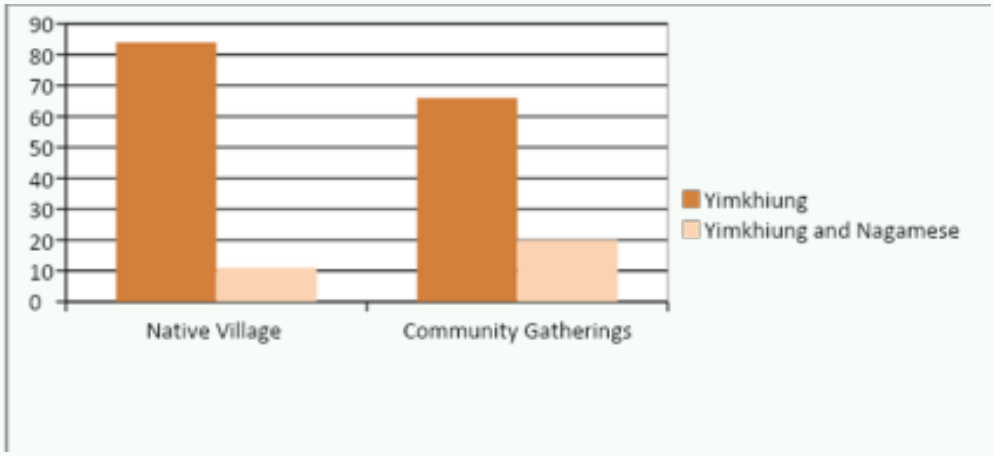


**Figure 3: Community Domain**

Figure 3 above shows that 84% of the speakers use Yimkhiung to speak with a friend in their native village. It is very rare to see speakers of the same language communicating in Nagamese, English, or Hindi, except among younger generations, and even then, it is quite infrequent. The second bar in Figure 3 shows the use of languages at community gatherings where the usage of Yimkhiung is at 66%, and the use of Yimkhiung and Nagamese at 24%. Nagamese is used during community gatherings when there are guests/invitees from different communities.

**Religious Domain**

In the religious domain, 100% of the speakers use Yimkhiung to conduct the service/program in the church.

**Educational/Institutional Domain**

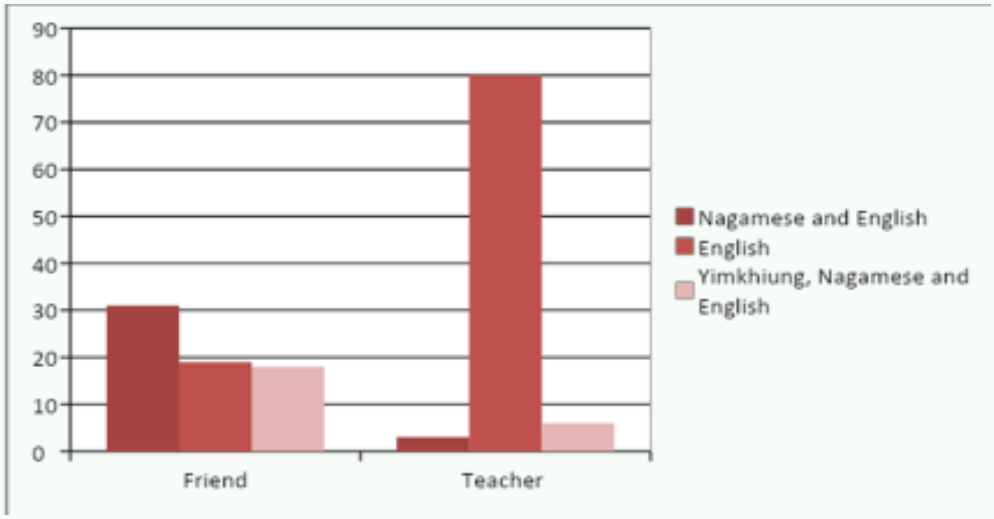


**Figure 4: Educational/Institutional Domain**

Figure 4 above illustrates the use of languages in an institutional domain. In educational institutes, 31% of Yimkhiung speakers use Nagamese and English when conversing with friends, 90% use only English, while the remaining 50% use Yimkhiung, Nagamese, and English interchangeably. The second bar in Figure 4 shows the languages used by teachers and students for interactions in the educational domain. We can see that 80% of the speakers converse in English with their teachers, while the remaining 20% use Nagamese, English, and Yimkhiung, depending on the situation.

**Mass Media:**

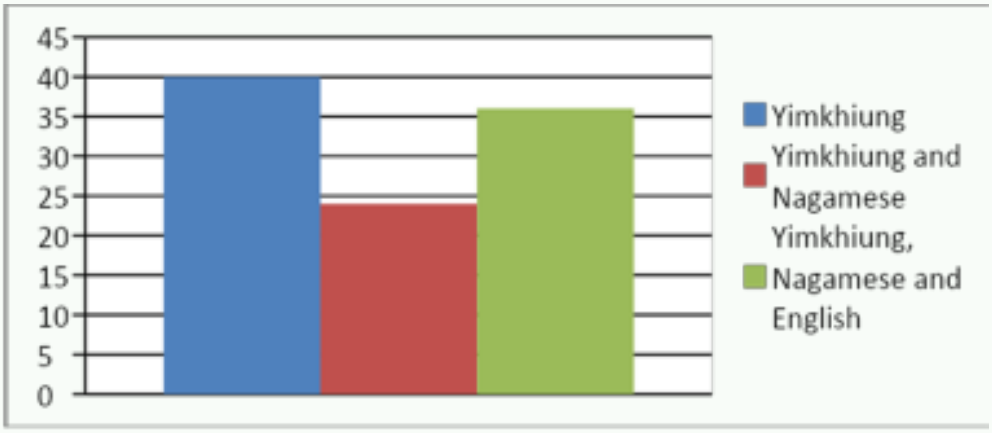


**Figure 5. Mass Media**

Figure 5 above indicates the usage of language in social media among the same community speakers. The data reveal that 40% of the speakers use Yimkhiung while texting the same language speaker, 24% of them use Yimkhiung and Nagamese, and 36% of them use Yimkhiung, Nagamese, and English interchangeably.

Multilingualism in India is not a recent phenomenon. Pandit (1977) observes that "diverse people have come and made their homes here for the last five thousand years." In a multilingual setting, with Nagamese serving as the lingua franca and English as a global language, let us examine the impact of multilingualism on native speakers.

Although there may be advantages of being a multilingual person, accessibility to a knowledge of other cultures, easier communication between different linguistic and cultural groups, increase in job opportunities, and gives a broader worldview, it can be a nuisance as its acquisition is considered an asset for some as there is no restriction in the choice of languages. In dominant multilingual countries, two languages are

considered a nuisance, three languages are uneconomical and many languages are absurd. Thus it is considered a hindrance or obstacle in the way of development (Pattanayak, 1984).

In the same way, although Yimkhiung speakers are maintaining the status of their mother tongue through cultural activities and interactions at the intra-community level, as well as encouraging its upliftment at social and political levels, the multilingual setting can be seen as a hindrance. The above tables and figures show us the decline of the usage of mother tongue in various domains. For example, there is no mother tongue language instruction in schools, resulting in a lack of mother tongue teachers. We observe a decline in the number of speakers reading mother tongue books and a shift in interest among students from Yimkhiung to English as the preferred language for higher education and jobs. Additionally, intra-sentential switching dramatically affects speakers' vocabulary. Peoples' perceptions about language influence the survival of a language. Social and political events shape peoples' attitudes toward their languages.

In conclusion, Multilingualism can act as 'the survival of the fittest' among the languages coexisting in society. Native speakers must be exposed to more than one language. It may happen that in some domains another language may occupy more marketing value than an indigenous language, and may come out better. But learning another language should never be considered as a deliberate attempt to abandon one's own language (Singh, 2001).

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# Documenting and Translating the Endangered Languages of Northeast India to Preserve the Vanishing Oral Literature

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## Abstract

The Northeastern part of India hosts the maximum number of endangered languages out of the 196 endangered languages of India listed by UNESCO. Most of these endangered languages of the region are oral languages and they are passed down from generation to generation through oral transmission. However, factors, such as globalization, cultural adjustment, religious conversion, and the increasing use of major languages in media and education has interfered with the smooth intergenerational transfer of the oral narratives of these language communities and the lack of an agency that can script their indigenous languages into written form led to their endangerment. Many oral literature of these language communities, in the form of folktales, folk songs, myths and traditional practices are fast vanishing. These literature often contain unique cultural perspectives, traditional knowledge, and distinct ways of expressing thoughts and emotions. Documentation of these oral narratives for the purpose of translation would create a rich corpus of community literature, and their translation into English (or into the larger Indian languages) would enhance the inter community access resulting in a better understanding of these communities. This paper discusses the important role of language documentation and translation in preserving endangered languages, exploring the significance of language as a cultural treasure, and how translation contributes to language revitalization efforts within the Northeast Indian context.

## Introduction

Language is inextricably linked to indigenous peoples' identity, their traditional knowledge, their experiences with the natural environment and hence territorial and cultural rights. A language reflects a unique world-view

and culture of a speech community, and "formulated its thinking, its system of philosophy and understanding of the world around it. Each language is the means of expression of the intangible cultural heritage of the people…" (Wurm, 2001). Over the course of generations, indigenous peoples have developed rich sets of knowledge about the natural world, health, technologies and techniques, rites and rituals and other cultural expressions. Turin provided four solid reasons for supporting, preserving and documenting endangered languages: "first, each and every language is a celebration of the rich cultural diversity of our planet; second, each language is an expression of an unique ethnic, social, regional or cultural identity and worldview; third, language is the repository of the history and beliefs of a people; and finally, every language encodes a particular subset of fragile human knowledge about agriculture, botany, medicine and ecology" (2005:5).

The current Ethnologue language database (Eberhard et al, 2021) listed 7139 distinct languages spoken in the world today; out of which roughly 40% of the languages are now endangered. A language that is at risk of losing all of its native speakers and falling out of use within the next generations is referred to as an 'endangered language'. If a language loses all of its speakers, it becomes an extinct language. That means more than 3000 world's languages are at risk of dying out in the coming century if nothing is done. According to Krauss (1992:6), as many as 50% of the world's languages are no longer being learned by new generations of speakers, which leads him to conclude that "the number of languages which, at the rate things are going, will become extinct during the coming century is 3000

of 6000". Krauss estimated the world's languages in active use to be around 6000.

The loss of language causes the loss of other culturally significant practices that are dependent on the language. Oral histories are lost if no one can speak the language any more. Likewise, traditional songs, poetry, and other verbal art forms are lost. Even if the language has been written down, language loss may cause written tales to be lost as well, if they were not translated into another language first. When a community loses its language, it also loses many other aspects of its culture. Language loss has a significant impact on both the collective and the individual identities of a community. Now is the time to act and record their voices before they die and the rich language and cultural legacy is lost. Unless we preserve these the next generations will have no knowledge of their cultural heritage. The oral traditions are a repository of indigenous knowledge which has been in practice since ages and that knowledge should be preserved and passed on to the generations to come.

The present paper is an attempt to understand and conceptualize the role of documentation and translation in preserving and disseminating oral heritage represented by languages and dialects, and consequently keep them far from extinction within the Northeast Indian context. Attention to the collection and codification of oral heritage by scholars of different disciplines has become important and essential for the preservation of unexplored oral literature of the North-east Indian communities that is vanishing due to modernization and globalization.

**Language Documentation And Translation**

Language documentation comprises the collection, processing and archiving of linguistic data – for example, texts, word lists, recordings of conversations, videos where people narrate folk tales or sing folk songs and so on. Currently, language documentation is most strongly associated with the documentation of endangered and unwritten languages. These languages are usually minority languages which are affected by processes of language shift and language loss. The documentation of endangered languages is an especially important and urgent task if we want to at least preserve some of the wealth that these languages possess and that otherwise will soon be gone forever. Many of these languages do not have a written tradition and written data may be completely unavailable or sparse, the languages are not used in the media, or their speakers do not use the Internet (and if they do, they often use another language).

Ideally, language documentation contains representative samples from different speakers – representing different age groups, different professions, of both sexes, and different origins. We mentioned three elements of language documentation: collecting (recording, taking pictures, gathering written documents, etc.), processing (analyzing, systematizing, transcribing, translating, etc.) and storing (archiving) data. These elements can be thought of as three successive steps.

Translation is the communication of the meaning of a source-language text by means of an equivalent target-language text (Bhatia, 1992). It involves the process of converting the meaning of written text from one language into another to maintain the original message and communication. Among the various methods of preserving languages, translation stands out

as one of the most reliable and effective tools for revitalizing and reshaping a language. Historically, translation was primarily regarded as essential for the survival of literature. However, with the advent of global perspectives on translation and the socio-cultural shift in Translation Studies, the role of translation has expanded, and the idea of preserving languages through translation has gained traction. In a multilingual country like India, translation serves multiple purposes: it aids in the survival of languages, literature, and culture; acts as a bridge of communication among diverse languages; enriches native languages and literature; and serves as a valuable tool in business and industry, among other functions. Given the rise of English as a lingua franca and its dominance in India, it is crucial to focus on the preservation of other languages that are on the brink of extinction.

Translating various cultural traditions, particularly the oral literature of endangered languages, into different languages not only extends the life of those traditions but also gives them a new form. By translating works that are otherwise unavailable or unknown in the target language, translators enable librarians and booksellers to stock their shelves, critics and journalists to fill pages of print, teachers and professors to introduce other cultures to their students, and readers to access innovative ideas and practices, among other benefits.

**Linguistics Scenario Of The North-east India**

Endangered languages are spoken in every state in India, but they cluster in two main regions – north-east and central-east India – where 'tribal' populations dominate. Of the 170 or so languages under threat, more than half are Tibeto-Burman languages in north-east India (mostly in Arunachal

Pradesh and Nagaland) that are reported in The UNESCO's Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger (Moseley, ed. 2010).

The reasons for language decline and potential extinction are not linguistic. These languages are not fading away due to a lack of complex grammar or extensive vocabulary. They are declining because they are considered unfashionable, are not transmitted at home, receive limited state support, and are not taught in schools. In India, where languages and scripts are integral to regional identities and political power, these unofficial and unscripted languages are at a significant disadvantage.

Government support for endangered languages could be significantly enhanced at the state level, which is essential since states determine the medium of instruction and language use in local government. Although several endangered languages are legally approved for use in state (or district-level) schools, few are regularly heard in classrooms. While larger, vulnerable languages are taught in schools, the majority do not enjoy even this limited recognition within their own communities.

Indian states have the freedom to adopt one or more languages as their official languages. Several northeastern states have chosen a vulnerable language spoken by a large percentage of their population as one of their official languages, such as Meitei in Manipur, Bodo in Assam, Kokborok in Tripura, Mizo in Mizoram, and Garo and Khasi in Meghalaya. However, the extensive linguistic diversity in Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh has led to a different situation. No single local language is spoken by a large enough percentage of the population to be accepted as the official state language. Consequently, English is the official language in Nagaland, while Hindi holds that status in Arunachal Pradesh. These decisions also reflect a desire

to establish a cultural identity distinct from Assam, India, and Hinduism. In Nagaland, some Naga languages are taught in schools, mainly in rural areas. Nagamese, a widely used lingua franca in urban areas where speakers of different languages interact, is seen by some as reflecting unwelcome Indian influence due to its roots in Assamese and Hindi. As a result, English, often associated with the Christian Naga identity, has become the default language.

Another crippling factor for most of North-east India's threatened languages is the lack of a viable script. Although scripts have been invented, rediscovered, and revived for several languages, very few are regularly used in schools or public life. Many of these languages appear in print (in Roman, Devanagari, or an invented script) as Christian prayer books and biblical translations, especially in the northeast; this usage may serve as a lifeline for them. Some threatened languages are also used in classrooms, but they are often overshadowed by English and Hindi school books printed in the Latin and Devanagari alphabets.

**Urgency For Language Documentation And Translation**

Writing is a recent thing for many of these north-east endangered language communities. For generations, these communities have practiced oral tradition. Oral tradition contains historical events, moral values, religious values, custom, folk tales, myths, songs, spells, chants, proverbs, rhymes, lullabies, and so on. Oral tradition can also be interpreted as a form of a number of customs that have been established in certain communities, a series of beliefs, the routines which are performed repeatedly to show the continuity through the spoken word or phrase by mouth (Errington, 1984).

Many of these communities still have a living tradition of oral narrations. However, due to the failure of intergenerational transfer of the oral narratives in these communities and the lack of an agency that can script their indigenous dialects into written form has threatened the oral literature.

Christianity, along with modern education, came to this part of the world in the early twentieth century. Religious conversion and education brought about drastic change to the life of these community members. Many of their traditional and cultural practices and activities could not be continued. Rituals and chants associated with the old belief system had to be abandoned. The system of 'youth dormitory', which played a vital role in transferring as well as maintaining traditional knowledge, disintegrated. The villagers have lost much of their traditional knowledge since conversion to Christianity. Children growing up in Christian homes were not taught of their culture and tradition. This trend has been going on for at least two to three generations. The present generation does not learn traditional songs, folk songs, traditional dances, folktales, narratives, chants and rituals. Traditional ceremonies and festivals have been replaced by other religious events like Christmas, New Year, Easter, Thanksgiving and other church related activities. Hence, the present younger generations are gradually losing their cultural identity as well.

Schools in these areas are mostly English medium or the dominant regional language. The dominance of the English language as a medium of instruction in schools, the cultural dominance of Hindi and other languages on television and other forms of media are also contributing factors to the state of decline of these languages.

Younger generation remains indifferent to their languages. They are not aware of the state of decline of their language, thus, feel no sense of responsibility for its preservation and development. In the face of modernization, many younger speakers' have developed negative attitudes towards their own language and culture. They feel their language and culture is irrelevant in this modern world. Such attitudes are leading them to mimic and identify with foreign cultures, both from the West (particularly the USA) and also East Asia (particularly Korea), copying fashion trends and music forms. Many younger members of these communities have also moved away from traditional occupation of farming and often travel outside the region in search of better education and job opportunities. Therefore, documentation and translation of these languages is vital not simply to save oral traditions from extinction but to also restore a stronger sense of identity and cultural self-worth among the younger generation.

**Where to start?**

The traditional practice of story-telling is no longer popular in these communities. As is the case in oral societies, story-telling is typically the job of elders. With the passing of elders and the introduction of modern media, this genre has become highly endangered. Only a few elders in villages can remember traditional stories well. Thus, one can begin by giving special focus on the documentation and translation of traditional stories, myths and legends from monolingual men and women who can recollect such narrations.

Folk tales across the oral communities in North-east India share similar themes, such as, moral lessons, funny stories, stories about animals and birds, stories about gods and spirits, and so on. Stories with moral

themes contain wisdom of their forefathers in forms of stories of success and failure. Animal theme stories are about a past world where both men and animals lived together, conversed with each other and provided the reason why certain animals have certain characteristics. Funny stories usually involve a particular character who is a trickster or prankster and his mischief(s). Stories of gods and spirits are about how the gods blessed or cursed man according to his conduct. It also has moral interpretations such as, if you do good, gods will bless you, but if you do bad things, gods will curse you. Such stories, once documented and translated into English or other major Indian languages, will not only help in preserving the language but will also open doors for others to learn of the world view, belief system, tradition, culture, etc. of these communities.

Traditional rhymes, children play songs, short stories and lullabies are being replaced by other languages. This genre can be explored and included in pedagogical material. The genres mentioned here are just a few to start with. There are many more areas of oral literature that can be captured before it vanishes.

**Conclusion**

Documentation and translation of these languages is important because it will facilitate the process of sharing and preserving the cultural heritage of these communities which would otherwise be lost. Linguists, Anthropologists, Historians, and a wide range of community members should be encouraged to participate in documentation, description and translation of these languages. According to G N Devy, who led the People's Linguistic Survey of India (2010) from the front, there is an urgent need of preventing this future extinction by documenting and translating these oral

narratives. Documentation of these narratives for the purpose of translation would create a rich corpus of community literature, and their translation into English (or into the larger Indian languages) would enhance the intercommunity access resulting in a better understanding of these communities. More importantly, their documentation and translation may succeed in preventing the possible extermination of languages and would strengthen the indigenous knowledge systems.

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**About the Book:**

This ebook, ranging from phonology and morphology to sociolinguistic aspects is the culmination of the collective efforts of scholars and researchers who have meticulously explored a diverse range of linguistic topics, with a special focus on the languages of Northeast India. The linguistic landscape of this region deserves more scholarly attention, and *Words and Beyond* is an attempt to contribute some insights to that endeavour. A noteworthy aspect of this ebook is that all contributors are native linguists or scholars conducting research on their own languages and cultures, and it is hoped that this gives a fresh perspective to linguistic studies of the region.

**About Tetso College:**

Tetso College, established in 1994, is a Nagaland University (NU) affiliated college and NAAC accredited. It is a multi-campus College with Sovima Campus as the headquarter situated in Sovima Village, Dimapur, Nagaland. The college takes priority in ensuring the students receive an effective educational foundation. Tetso College has been an innovator in higher education with top-ranked academic programmes aimed at promoting a global vision to further the institution's mission and vision.

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