

Segmental Phonology of Moyon

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Abstract:

Moyon is a Tibeto-Burman language, spoken by about 2000 people in Chandel District, Manipur, Northeast India. The name Moyon refers to the community as well as the language. The people however, referred to themselves as “Bujuur”. Moyon is an under documented language and has remained little known. Though ethnically affiliated to the Naga group, Moyon linguistically belongs to the North-Western Kuki-Chin branch (NWKC), formerly referred to as the “Old Kuki” branch.

This paper presents a preliminary analysis of the segmental phonology of Moyon language. In this paper, an inventory of the phonemes of Moyon, specifying their distribution and showing diagrammatically the consonant and vowel phonemes along with their place and manner of articulation are discussed as part of articulatory description.

Key words: Tibeto-Burman, Northwest Kuki-Chin, Moyon, Segmental Phonology

1. Introduction

Moyon is a North-Western Kuki-Chin language (NWKC) spoken in sixteen villages of Chandel District, Manipur. The District lies in the south-eastern part of Manipur at 24o40' N

Latitude and 93o50' E Longitude. It is the border district of the state. Its neighbors are Myanmar (erstwhile Burma) to the east and south, Ukhrul district to the northeast, Churachandpur district to the west and south, and Thoubal district to the north. It is about 64 km. away from Imphal, the capital of Manipur. The district is inhabited by several communities. Prominent communities in the district are Anal, Chothe, Lamkang, Maring, Monsang, Moyon, Paite, Tarao, Thadou, and Zou etc. This paper presents the segmental phonology of Moyon language. The analysis is based on data elicited from native speakers of the language.

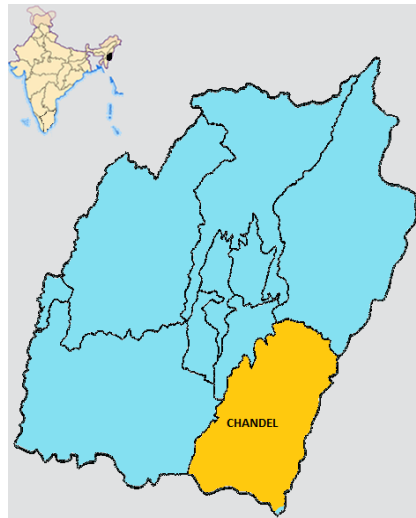


Fig. Map (Not to scale) of Manipur, India showing Chandel District.

2. Segmental Phonemes

In phonology, a major division is often made into segmental and supra-segmental (or non-segmental) categories. Segmental phonology analyses the speech into distinctive units, or phonemes (segmental phonemes), which have a fairly direct correspondence with phonetic segments (Crystal, 2003). There

are two types of segmental phonemes, namely, consonants and vowels.

2.1. Consonants

There are twenty consonant phonemes in Moyon. The phonemic consonant inventory of Moyon by place and manner of articulation is given in Table 1.

Table 1. Moyon Consonantal phonemes

	Bilabial	Labio-dental	Alveolar	Post-Alveolar	Velar	Glottal
Stop/Plosive	p b p ^h		t d t ^h		k k ^h	ʔ
Nasal	m		n		ŋ	
Trill			r			
Fricative		f v	s z			h
Affricate				tʃ		
Lateral Approximant			l			

2.1.1. Distribution of consonants

The distinctive consonants that can occur as onset and coda are given below in Table 2:

	Onset consonant	Coda consonants
voiceless unaspirated stops	/p, t, k/	/p, t, k, ʔ/
voiceless aspirated stops	/p ^h , t ^h , k ^h /	
voiced stops	/b, d/	
voiceless affricate	/tʃ/	
voiceless fricative	/f, s, h/	
voiced fricative	/v, z/	
nasals	/m, n, ŋ/	/m, n, ŋ/
rhotic	/r/	/r/
lateral	/l/	

Table 2. Moyon consonantal phonemes showing syllable onsets and codas.

Table 2. shows that all of the consonants can occur as syllable onsets, while 8 can occur as codas.

2.1.2. Onset consonants

Stops

The contrast between voiceless unaspirated stops are shown in (1) with the help of minimal pairs.

Unaspirated stops

- | | | | |
|--------|------|-------|-------------|
| (1) a. | /p-/ | /par/ | ‘touch’ |
| b. | /t-/ | /tar/ | ‘to be old’ |
| c. | /k-/ | /kar/ | ‘to save’ |

The contrast between voiceless aspirated stops are shown in (2) with the help of minimal pairs.

Aspirated

- | | | | |
|--------|--------------------|---------------------|-----------------|
| (2) a. | /p ^h -/ | /p ^h en/ | ‘to open’ |
| b. | /t ^h -/ | /t ^h en/ | ‘to give light’ |
| c. | /k ^h -/ | /k ^h en/ | ‘to waylay’ |

Moyon also contrasts voiceless unaspirated, voiceless aspirated and voiced stops at bilabial, alveolar and velar place of articulation as shown in (3), (4) and (5) below.

Bilabial

- | | | | |
|--------|--------------------|---------------------|--------------|
| (3) a. | /p-/ | /pen/ | ‘be content’ |
| b. | /p ^h -/ | /p ^h en/ | ‘to open’ |
| c. | /b-/ | /ben/ | ‘arm’ |

Alveolar

- | | | | |
|--------|--------------------|--------------------|---------------|
| (4) a. | /t-/ | /tu/ | ‘to do’ |
| b. | /t ^h -/ | /t ^h u/ | ‘drive’ |
| c. | /d-/ | /du/ | ‘to lay trap’ |

Velar

- | | | | |
|--------|--------------------|--------------------|-----------|
| (5) a. | /k-/ | /ki/ | ‘to pull’ |
| b. | /k ^h -/ | /k ^{hi} / | ‘leg’ |

Nasals

The three nasals of Moyon are illustrated with the help of minimal pairs in (6) below.

- | | | | |
|--------|------|------|-------------------|
| (6) a. | /m-/ | /me/ | ‘face’ |
| b. | /n-/ | /ne/ | ‘younger sibling’ |
| c. | /ŋ-/ | /ŋe/ | ‘to like’ |

Fricatives and Affricate

The contrast between the fricatives at different places of articulation is provided with the help of minimal pair in (7), (8) and (9) below.

Labio-dental fricatives

- | | | | |
|--------|------|--------------------|-----------|
| (7) a. | /f-/ | /f ^w u/ | ‘noise’ |
| b. | /v-/ | /v ^w u/ | ‘to fart’ |

Alveolar fricatives

- | | | | |
|--------|------|-------|--------------|
| (8) a. | /s-/ | /sar/ | ‘sister’ |
| b. | /z-/ | /zar/ | ‘to scatter’ |

Alveolar and glottal fricatives

- | | | | |
|--------|------|-------|--------------|
| (9) a. | /s-/ | /sem/ | ‘distribute’ |
| b. | /h-/ | /hem/ | ‘to pound’ |
| c. | /z-/ | /zar/ | ‘to scatter’ |
| d. | /h-/ | /har/ | ‘to despise’ |

Lateral and rhotic

Moyon has one lateral and one rhotic each at the alveolar place of articulation. The contrast between the two is shown below with the help of minimal pairs.

(10) a.	/r-/	/ram/	‘land’
b.	/l-/	/lam/	‘road/path’

2.1.3. Coda consonants

As shown in Table 2. the coda may consist of the stops /p, t, k/ , nasals /m, n, ŋ/ and rhotic /r/. The distribution of the voiceless unaspirated stops, nasals and rhotic can be established in coda position as in (11) and (12) below.

Stops coda and Rhotic

(11) a.	/-p/	/kip/	‘to be exact in number’
b.	/-t/	/amit/	‘gall bladder’
c.	/-k/	/mik/	‘eye’
d.	/-ʔ/	/miʔ/	‘banana’
d.	/-r/	/kir/	‘goat’

Nasal coda and Rhotic

(12) a.	/-m/	/isem/	‘to make’
b.	/-n/	/isen/	‘to be red’
c.	/-ŋ/	/isenŋ/	‘to be clean’
d.	/-r/	/iser/	‘taboo’

2.2. Vowels

Moyon can be described as having six monophthong vowels as shown in Table 3.

	Front	Central	Back
High	i		u
Mid	e	ə	o
Low		a	

Table 3. Moyon Vowels

The Moyon vowel phonemes may be described in as follows.

- /i/ = high, front, unrounded vowel
- /u/ = high, back, rounded vowel
- /e/ = mid, front, unrounded vowel
- /ə/ = mid, central, unrounded vowel

/o/ = mid, back, rounded vowel

/a/ = low, central, unrounded vowel

The different phonemic status of these six vowels can be established on the basis of the following minimal and near minimal pairs.

(13) a.	/i/	/pir/	‘dust’
b.	/u/	/pur/	‘gather’
c.	/e/	/per/	‘strong’
d.	/ə/	/pɛr/	‘to drop-by’
e.	/o/	/apor/	‘foam’
f.	/a/	/par/	‘to bloom’

Concluding remarks

This paper presents a preliminary analysis of Moyon segmental phonology. As a result, this paper cannot claim to be an exhaustive study approaching the full-scale phonology of the language. Altogether, 20 consonants and six vowels have been established. Of the total number of consonants, only the voiceless unaspirated stops /p, t, k, ʔ/, the nasals /m, n, ŋ/ and the rhotic /r/ occur in coda position.

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