Consonant Phoneme of Koch Language: An Analytical Study

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Abstract

Apart from the indigenous peoples living in the North-East India, the majority of the people belong to Tibet-Burmese, one of the branches of the Chino-Tibetan language group. The Bodo, Rabha, Karbi, Tiwa, Mech, Dimacha, Miching, Garo people are belongs to this Tibet - Burmese language group. The Koch is a group of people who are similar to these tribes. This Koch community has its own language, culture and folk literature which are spreading in Assam, Meghalaya, and West Bengal of India and also in the countries like Nepal and Bangladesh. The linguistic, literary-cultural characteristics of this group has retained by some of its clan till today. But without its own script and written literature, the group's own language, art culture is on the verge of disappearance. Therefore, our main goal is to revive the invaluable resources of the Koch community. For this purpose, the Consonant Phoneme of the Koch language, which is   the basic phonology of Koch language formation, are systematically analyzed in this research paper from primary sources of data.

Keywords: Language, Chino-Tibetan, Koch, Phoneme, Consonant.

0.0 Introduction

0.1 Main Topic: The Assam, situated in North-East part of India is full of people of different races, tribes, languages and religions. Most of the people who have contributed to the formation of Assamese race, culture and language are Mongoloids, besides Aryans, Dravidians and Austronesia's. These Mongoloids peoples are the Ahoms, the Boros, the Tiwas, the Mechs, the Rabhas, the Dimachas, the Karbis, the Garos, the Michings etc. One of the groups that have similarities with these communities is the Koch. The people of this community have been migrating to various states of South-East Asia and many of them have been settling in various part of India, mainly in Assam and Meghalaya.

In recent times, Koch's identities have change. The contribution of the Koch clan   in the nurture and development of Assamese race, language, literature and culture cannot be underestimated. Recently, the language and culture of the community has been slowly disappearing due to the effects of globalization, unawareness of their own existence, influence of already well established Language and culture of various communities etc. The Koch community of Assam as a whole and particularly its various sub-groups has not been scientifically studied till date. Therefore, the distinctive consonant phoneme of the Koch language within the primary phonetic level of the Koch community will be analytically studied in this study.

0.2 Importance of the Study: The sub-groups of Koch community are: Harigaya, Satpariya, Dasgaya or Banai, Chapra , Wanang and Tintekiya. Many of them in present-day segments have almost given up their own Koch language. Apart from these sub-groups, few of them, namely Tintekia , Wanang and Hargaya , residing in Garo Hills of Meghalaya and in different parts of Assam, mainly in Goalpara , Dhubri,   Hojai ,   Karbi Anglang , Udalguri districts are practicing their own language and culture till date. Therefore, in order to prove the uniqueness of the Koch community, it is important to study the Koch community as a whole and particularly its sub-groups.

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As stated earlier, the community has come to the brink of losing itself in many ways, under the influence of different communities or under the influence of modern tools. Therefore, in order to preserve the community's own identity, there is a need to preserve its language, culture, folklore, etc. This is one of the main reasons for the study of the said content. In addition, it is said that language and literature are the essence of society and nation. Therefore, there is a need for study of the content in order to gain a thorough knowledge of the language of the Koch community.

0.3 **Objective of the study:**

1. To analyze the phonemic features of Koch languages.

2. To determine the quality of consonants phoneme in the Koch language.

3. To analyze the contrastive distribution of consonants phoneme in the Koch language.

4. To collect, preserve and evaluation of Koch Language content.

0.4 Scope of the Study: Content Study deals with the discussion of consonants phoneme within the phonology of Koch living in Assam, along with discussion on the contrastive distribution of consonants phoneme.

0.5 Methods of study: Efforts have been made to follow descriptive methods in the study of content, although attempts have been made to adopt explanatory-analytical methods as required. Both primary and secondary sources are used in data retrieval. Care has been taken to gather data through informant in field studies as the main source. As a secondary source, writings, interpretations, analysis, statements, ideas, etc. About the main source are considered. The methods to be followed are

1) Data collection

2) Observation

3) Significance

4) Explanation of opinion.

0.6 Review of Literature: No detailed discussion of the language of the Koch community and its sub-groups, living in Assam are available. The following is a list of books, articles, pamphlets, etc., that have been published on the language of Koch and its clans.

1. Abdul Baten Mandal received PhD degree from the University of Gauhati in 2010 after conducting research on the spoken language and folklore of the Koch language group.

2. Raju Baruah received Ph D degree from Gauhati University in 2011 for her studies on 'Socio-Culture and Language of Garopahar Koch Community'. The study of this research book can be said to have opened a new direction in the study of Koch language.

3. In the Linguistic Survey of India, Vol.III, P. II (e-book) (1903) by George Abraham Grierson, mentioned few comments on the Language of Koch community along with Tintekiya and other clans as a part of the Tibetan-Burmese language family.

4. Sunita Kumar Chatterjee's Kirata-Jana-Kriti (e-book) (1951) contains a brief discussion of the primitive settlements of the Koch community.

5. The Garos (1996), written by Major A. Playfair's, discussed about Koch and Tintekiya as an ethnographic group.

6. In Habin Koch article, "Description about socio culture on Koch, Dalu, Hajang, Garo and Chakma in Hoaji district", in the silver jubilee Souvenir 'Dabak', published by Srimanta Sankardev vikash kēndra, Hojai, Assam, India (2010), described briefly about Koch community. But no scientific discussion of the Koch language is available in that article.

7. Shivendra Narayan Koch's book, "KOCH *JANAGUSTHIR ATIT SANDHANAT ETI KHOJ* (A Search in the history of the Koch Community)", published by the Meghalaya Koch Association in 2012, explores the historical and geographical location of the Koch community. In his discussion, he describes in details about the different terms used for Koch community, Clan, migration to India, past and present of Koch language, and the development of Koch kingdom in India.

8. In the book, "A History of Assam (Reprint) (2019)", written by Sir Edward Gate contains a brief overview of the history of the Koch people and details of the Koch kings from the fifteenth century onwards. But in that book, no details scenario of the language of Koch community is available.

Although, in the above mentioned books, articles, research books, PhD thesis and in journals discussed about the Koch community, yet the virgin subject matter of the Koch community, especially phonology of the Koch community, inhabited   in the various corners of Assam, is need to be discussed in systematic and scientific way.

1.0 Phonology of Koch Language.

1.1 Phonology:

The basic element of language is Phone. This is the primary unit of language. It is pronounced or produced by the human glands or organs of speech. Linguistics is the study of the level at which language is discussed or judged – viz. what these Phone are, how they are pronounced, what is their quality or nature, how they are used or applied in the language. As discussed by Arpana Konwar in her book [1], "Phonology generally deals with the Phone spoken in a language". Specially, in language, the production of spoken sounds, and the quality and nature of sounds are analyzed minutely. Here, emphasis is placed on the practical aspects of the language. This is why phonology plays an important role in the discussion of the structure of a language.

1.2 Consonant phoneme of Koch Language:

In the Koch language, there are 24 (twenty four) consonants, including the two 'w' and 'y' of semi vowels. These are- / p /, / b /, / ph /, / bh /, /t/, / d /, / th /, / dh /, / k /, / g /, / kh /, / gh /, / ts /, / dz /, / tsh /, / dzh /, / m /, / n /, / ŋ /, / h /, / r /, / l /, / w /, / j /. According to the points of articulation and manner of articulator mentioned below a chart of consonant phoneme in the Koch language is mentioned below:-

Chart of Consonant phonemes of Koch Language

Points of articulation > Manner of articulator ☐v		Bilabial		Alveolar		Palatal	Velar		Glottal
		Voiceless	Voiced	Voiceless	Voiced	Voiced	Voiceless	Voiced	Voiceless
Plosive Sound	Unaspirated	/p/	/b/	/t/	/d/		/k/	/g/	
	Aspirated	/ph/	/bh/	/th/	/dh/		/kh/	/gh/	
Affricative Sound	Unaspirated			/ts/	/dz/				
	Aspirated			/tsh/	/dzh/				
Nasal Sound			/m/		/n/			/ŋ/	
Fricative Sound									/h/

Trill Sound				/r/			
Lateral Sound				/l/			
Semi-Vowel		/w/			/j/		

In the Koch dialect shown above, the four affricative sounds- / ts /, / tsh /, / dz /, / dzh / pronounced in the Koch language give the Koch language a distinctive dimension and establish itself as a co-language with other Tibetan-Burmese languages. Mandal's opinion about this sound is - "The alveolar sound of Sanskrit- 's', 'sh', 'z', 'zh' etc. are pronounced double-gest sound in Koch language as / ts /, / tsh /, / dz /, / dzh /, i.e. homo organic affricates. [2] On the other hand, the unaspirated and aspirated sounds used in the Koch language have also given a special dimension to this language. The fricative sounds of Sanskrit s, ṣ, ś are pronounced as / tsh / in the Koch language on the contrary /x/ is pronounced in the Assamese Language. According to Mandal also, 'Sanskrit dental, palatal, retroflex s, ṣ, ś sounds and velar voiceless fricative / x / sound in the Assamese are transforms to voiceless aspirated fricative / tsh / in Koch language. [3]

In the Koch language, all the consonant sounds have a constructive distribution in all positions of the word in analogous and identical environment. 'ŋ' and 'j' are not used at the beginning of the word. In the same way, all consonant sounds except 'gh' in the middle of the word are applied antithetically. The aspirated 'ph', 'th', 'dh', 'kh', 'gh', affricative un aspirated 'dz' and aspirated 'dzh' and glottal 'h' phonemes are rare used at the end position of the word in Koch Language. - The use of the obvious short-lived sound dz and the long-lived sound dzh and the vocal sounds h are rare. The following is an attempt to show the distribution of the word in all three positions by judging the opposition of all the consonant sounds.

1.2.1 Constructive distribution of Koch consonants:

Initial of the word:

/p/   - /pairu/ 'pairu' [pigeon]   /dz/ -   /dzaba/ 'zaba' [cooked vegetables]

/tsh/   -/tshairu/ 'śairu' [maina]   /d/ -   /daba/ 'daba' [bed-bug]

/g/   - /gaŋ/ 'gaŋ' [river]   /b/ -   /bɒtsɒt/ 'bɒsɒt' [mango]

/n/ - /naŋ/ 'naŋ' [you]   /m/ -   /mɒtsɒt/ 'mɒsɒt' [rat]

/r/ - /raŋ/ 'raŋ' [cloud]   /h/ -   /ha/ 'ha' [land]

/ts/ - /tsaŋ/ 'saŋ' [who]   /ph/ - /pha/ 'pha' [teeth]

/dz/ - /dzidzitsɒŋ/ 'zizisaŋ' [dragonfly]   /w/ -   /wa/ 'wa' [bamboo]

/dzh/ - /dzhidzhitsɒŋ/ 'dzidzisaŋ' [cicada]   /m/ -   /matshu/ 'mashu' [cow]

/b/ - /bijai/ 'biyai' [where]   /kh/ - /khatshu/ 'khashu' [cough]

/dz/ - /dzijai/ 'dziyai' [where]   /t/ -/talai/ 'talay' [forest]

/dz/ - /dzɒŋ/ 'zɒŋ' [brother]   /th/ -   /thalai/ 'thalay' [toung]

/l/ - /lɒŋ/ 'lɒŋ' [clove]   /k/ -   /kalai/ 'kalay' [a kind of pulse]

/t/ - /tau/ 'ṭau' [bird]   /b/ -   /but/ 'būt' [pull]

/dh/ - /dhau/ 'ḍhau' [wave]   /bh/ -   /bhut/ 'bhūt' [a kind of tree]

/g/ -   /gari/ 'gaṛi' [car]   /gh/ -   /ghari/ 'ghari' [stroke]

Middle of the word:

/p/ - /dupu/ 'dupu' [snake]   /dz/ -   /dzidzitsɒŋ/ 'zizisaŋ' [dragonfly]

/ph/ - /diphu/   'Ádihpu' [piles]   /dzh/ - /dzhidzhitsɒŋ/ 'dzidzisaŋ' [cicada]

/ph/ - /dɛphɛt/ 'dɛphɛt' [to hole]   /g/ -   /tsagi/ 'sagi' [eighty]

/b/ -   /dɛbɛt/ 'dɛbɛt' [to boil]   /tsh/ -/tsatshi/ 'sashi' [seventy]

/m/ -/amai/ 'amay' [mother]   /k/-/dzako/ 'zako'[great grandfather]

/k/ -/akai/ 'akay' [lizard]   /dz/-/dzadzo/'dzadzo' [grandfather]

/ts/ -   /atsɛp/ 'atsɛp' [cockroach]   /t/ -   /ati/ 'ati' [aunty]

/dz/ -   /adzɛp/ 'adzɛp' [fan]   /n/ -   /ani/ 'ani' [mine]

/p/ -   /pinwˍk / 'pinwˍk' [black]   /k/ -   /phakkar/ 'phakkar' [armpit]

/tsh/ - /pitshwˍk / 'pishwˍk' [red]   /kh/ -   /nakhar/ 'nakhar' [ear]

/k/ -   /karaŋˍ/ 'karaŋˍ' [feather]   /b/   -/kanbɒk/'kanbɒk'[white appearance)

/l/ -   /kalaŋˍ/ 'kalaŋˍ' [squirrel]   /bh/ -/kanbhar/ 'kanbhar' [unwell]

/ŋˍ/ - /haŋai/ 'haŋay' [place of jhom cultivate)   /t/   -   /bantao/ 'bantao' [brinjal]

End of the word:

/p/ - /tɛp/ 'tɛp' [a little]   /m/ -/tam/ 'tam' [to be played upon]

/k/ - /tɛk/ 'tɛk' [little]   /n/ - /tan/ 'tan' [keep]

/t/ - /tsat/ 'sat' [thirty]   /ŋˍ/ - /taŋˍ / 'taŋˍ' [stay]

/b/ - /tsab/ 'sab' [forty]   /n/ - /gin/ 'gin' [eight]

/k/ - /huk/ 'huk' [to serve rice]   /tsh/ - /gitsh/ 'gish' [nine]

/g/ - /hug/ 'hug' [belly]   /k/ - /bɒndɒk/ 'bɒndɒk' [pawn]

/d/ - /bɒlɒd/ 'bɒlɒd' [cow]   /ph/ - /phar/ 'phar' [night]

/l/ - /phal/ 'phal' [good]   /p/ - /dap/ 'dap' [take heat]

Conclusion:
Unless there is a scientific study of a population, the identity and linguistic features, socio-cultural characteristics of that population cannot be ascertained. The systematic study of the language, literature and culture of the community concerned preserves the identity of the community as well as clarifies the picture of linguistic and cultural exchanges with other communities. It is hoped that the study of the subject matter will open up various aspects of the phonology of the Koch language as well as the **results** of the study mentioned below-

1.   The pronunciation of 'wˍ' sound is commonly found in Boro, Miching etc. languages of Assam.   Since

the existence of this sound in the Koch language, the Koch language can be said to be homogeneous with other tribal languages.

2.   The use of 24 consonants in the Koch language can be said to have given a special dimension to the phonology of the Koch language.

3.   There is no affricative sound in Aryan language. In Koch language, 'ts', 'tsh', 'dz' and 'dzh' are pronounced as affricative sounds. The pronunciation of this sound has given a special dimension to the Koch language as well as to the vernacular.

4.   The Sanskrit sounds like s, ṣ, ś are pronounced as 'tsh' in Koch language against the Assamese pronunciation is 'x'.

5.   In the Koch language, the sounds 'ŋ', 'wˍ' and 'j' are not used at the initial position of the word.

6.   In the Koch language, all consonant sounds except 'gh' in the middle of the word are applied antithetically.

7.   In the Koch language, the plosive aspirated 'ph', 'th', 'dh', 'kh', gh' ; affricative un aspirated 'dz', aspirated 'dzh' and glottal 'h' phonemes are rare used at the end position of the word.

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