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Exotic Phonemes: A Study of Manipuri Phonemes

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EXOTIC PHONEMES: A STUDY OF MANIPURI PHONEMES

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Manipuri Language

Manipuri language has many characteristic features of being a Tibeto-Burman language. One of most striking feature of Tibeto-Burman language is tones for conveying phonemic distinction. Manipuri language has only two tones i.e. falling and level. On the other hand, Burmese language has four tones. Thus, different languages have different number of tones. Tone is a feature of suprasegmental phoneme. In regards with the tonal features of the languages, “The African languages would be regarded as register tone languages, and the Asian as contour system” (John Clark & Colin Yallop, 1990:291). And Manipuri language is included in the contour tone system. But the present article is fully devoted to segmental phonemes of Manipuri.

The first step in studying any spoken language is to determine the phonemes (H.A. Gleason 1968:14). When we speak, we produce a continuous stream of sounds. In studying speech we divide this stream into small pieces that we call segments. The word ‘man’ is pronounced with a first segment **m**, a second segment **a** and a third segment **n** (Peter Roach 1991: 36). These segments represent different set of phonemes. The phoneme is the minimal feature of the expression system of a spoken language by which one thing that may be said is distinguished from any other thing, which might have been said (H.A. Gleason 1968:16).

A phoneme may be described roughly as a family of sounds consisting of an important sound of the language (generally the most frequently used member of that family) together with other related sounds which 'take its place' in particular sound sequences or under particular conditions of length or stress or intonation (Daniel Jones, 1997:49, twelfth printing).

Diligent search through the vocabulary of Manipuri explicitly identifies the Manipuri phonemes and their role in the language. English sound system has 28 consonant phonetic symbols; however they have only 20 consonants phonemic symbol. Manipuri Phonetic symbol and Phonemic symbols can be shown as under.

Manipuri consonant phonemes can be highlighted in the following chart.

	Bilabial		Alveolar		Palatal		Velar		Glottal
Plosive Unaspirate	p	b	t	d	c	ɟ	k	g	
Aspirate	ph	bh	th	dh		ɟh	kh	gh	
Fricative					s				h
Nasal		m		n				ŋ	
Lateral				l					
Trill				r					
Semi-vowel				w		j			

From the above consonant phonemic chart, it can be seen that there are only 24 consonant phonemes in Manipuri. These phonemes are found in present Manipuri.

There are only 15 consonants and 6 vowels in the indigenous sound system i.e. only 21 phonemes. Exotic phonemes are found only in consonant phonemes. The vowels in Manipuri are not discussed here. The consonant phonemes in the indigenous sound system of the language are,

p	t	k
ph	th	kh
m	n	ŋ

c	s	l
h	w	j

The exotic phonemes so far as used in the language is 9 in number. They are generally borrowed from the Indo-Aryan languages. The influence of Bengali is stronger than any other Indo-Aryan languages since the Manipuri speakers have been merged with the Bengali culture for the last three hundred years and more. As a result of sound change exotic phonemes are internalized as a native sound system. They are,

b	d	g
bh	dh	gh
	ʃ	r
	ʒh	

There are only 24 consonant phonemes in modern Manipuri language. Among these only 15 indigenous consonant phonemes can occur in any position of a syllable i.e. initial, medial and final position. On the other hand, the exotic phonemes cannot occur in initial and final position of Manipuri indigenous words. However, as results of sound change, morphophonemic change or phonetic change, exotic phonemes are profoundly used in the medial position i.e. voiceless sound becomes voiced sound. There are many words commonly used in the language in which exotic phonemes occur in initial or final position. However, all such words are loan word. Most of them are borrowed from Indo-Aryan languages. Example of exotic phonemes that occur in the initial position of a word:

Exotic phonemes	Word	Gloss
b	bəʃar	‘market’
	bor	‘boon’
	beri	‘cigar’
d	dəndi	‘punishment’

	dan	‘charity’
	daku	‘dacoit’
g	guru	‘teacher, guide’
	guha	‘well’
	gehu	‘wheat’
ʃ	ʃəhaj	‘ship’
	ʃati	‘race’
	ʃəntʁa	‘amulet’
r	rasi	‘sign of zodiac’
	reti	‘file’
	ras	‘Rasa, a dance’
bh	bhab	‘concept’
	bhut	‘ghost’
	bhəra	‘rent’
dh	dhəma	‘many, much’
	dholok	‘a drum’
	dhərma	‘religion’
gh	ghəri	‘watch’
	ghi	‘ghee’
	ghuti	‘kite’
ʃh	ʃhal	‘cymbal’
	ʃhut	‘cheat’
	ʃhəreṑ	‘ladle’

Exotic phonemes can also occur in the medial position of native word. Such word is very common in the language.

b	kəbok	‘parched rice’
	məbuŋ	‘her elder brother’

	thəbi	‘cucumber’
d	puŋdon	‘guava’
	sendon	‘debt’
	həndək	‘this time’
g	həŋgam	‘mustard’
	səgol	‘horse’
	səŋgom	‘milk’
ʃ	oʃa	‘teacher’
	phiʃon	‘dress’
	kuʃaj	‘jug’
r	jerum	‘egg’
	kurak	‘butterfly’
	uriŋ	‘pimple’
bh	phəmbhəm	‘sitting place’
	cabhəm	‘eating place’
dh	khəndhəbə	‘to think deeply’
	idhəw	‘my great-grandfather’
gh	ləŋghajbə	‘to throw with a force’
	nəmghajbə	‘to press with a force’
jh	nomʃhinbə	‘to work actively’
	phuʃhinbə	‘to beat with a force’

From the above examples, it is proved that most of voiced aspirated sounds; **bh**, **dh**, **gh**, and **jh** can occur frequently in loan words. However, there are few words they can occur in medial position of indigenous words. For instance, *idhəw* ‘great-grandfather’.

Exotic phonemes can also occur extensively in word final position of loan words. No single word is used with exotic phonemes in the final position of indigenous word. Example of exotic phonemes that occur in the final position of a word:

Exotic phonemes	Word	Gloss
b	bhab	'idea'
d	bənd	'bandh, blockade'
g	ʃəg	'jug'
ʃ	ʃəhaʃ	'ship'
r	car	'car'
bh*		
dh*		
gh*		
ʃh*		

The phonemes which are provided with asterisk mark (*) indicate that they cannot occur in the final position of any word.

ROLE OF EXOTIC PHONEME IN MORPHOPHONEMIC CHANGE:

Exotic phonemes play a vital role in morphophonemic change. The indigenous phonemes that change to exotic phonemes in morphophonemic level are as follows;

p	>	b
t	>	d
k	>	g
c	>	ʃ
l	>	r

1. The indigenous voiceless bilabial unaspirated stop /p/ becomes voiced bilabial unaspirated stop /b/.

2. The indigenous voiceless alveolar unaspirated stop /t/ becomes voiced alveolar unaspirated stop /d/.
3. The indigenous voiceless velar unaspirated stop /k/ becomes voiced velar unaspirated stop /g/.
4. The indigenous voiceless palatal unaspirated stop /c/ becomes voiced palatal unaspirated stop /ɟ/.
5. The indigenous voiced alveolar lateral /l/ becomes voiced alveolar trill /r/.

The following examples shows the phonemic change of voiceless to voiced in word level i.e. from **Proto-Manipuri (PM)** to **Modern Manipuri (MM)**

				PM		MM	Gloss
p	>	b	=	*capə	>	cabə	‘eat’
				*upə	>	ubə	‘see’
t	>	d	=	*ləmtəm	>	ləmdəm	‘place’
				*sutətpə	>	sudətpə	‘to pound and press’
k	>	g	=	*teŋkol	>	teŋgol	‘troop’
				*maki	>	magi	‘his/her’
c	>	ɟ	=	*kəwceŋ	>	kəwɟeŋ	‘locust’
				*cincak	>	cinɟak	‘food’
l	>	r	=	*cale	>	care	‘has eaten’
				*məli	>	məri	‘four’

The examples cited with asterisk marks (*) shown in the above table are reconstructed form.

The phonemes **b**, **d**, **g**, **ɟ**, and **r** are closely internalized as native sound. They are commonly used in most of Manipuri vocabulary. On the other hand, the remaining aspirated voiced sounds **bh**, **dh**, **gh**, and **ɟh** are incorporated to loan words. However, a

few Manipuri words used these aspirated voiced sound in the process of morphophonemic change.

For example,

ph	>	bh
th	>	dh
kh	>	gh
s/ʃ	>	ʃh

(1) ph ~ bh

phi + phəm	>	phibhəm / phibəm	‘situation, condition’
body state			

(2) th ~ dh

phu + thəw	>	phudhəw / phudəw	‘beat (him)’
beat progress			

(3) kh ~ gh

len + khajbə	>	lenghajbə / lenkhajbə	‘to lance off’
lance separate (with something)			

(4) s/ʃ ~ ʃh

in + sinbə	>	inʃhinbə / insinbə	‘push in’
push directional suffix (inward)			

The aspirated voiced sounds **bh**, **dh**, **gh**, and **ʃh** are very commonly found in loan words used in Manipuri. For instance,

bh	:		
bheləndri		‘lady’s finger’	
bhap		‘idea’	
bhəktə		‘devotee’	
dh	:		
dhol		‘drum’	
dhərma		‘religion, virtue’	

	dhup	‘incense’
gh	:	
	ghəri	‘watch, clock’
	ghumti	‘kite’
	ghi	‘ghee’
ɟh	:	
	ɟhan	‘cymbal
	ɟhulon	‘a festival’
	ɟhut	‘cheat’

In this regard the diffusionists theory of sound change can be remembered that : phonological change may be implemented in a manner that is phonetically abrupt but lexically gradual. As the change diffuses across the lexicon, it may not reach all the morphemes to which it is applicable. If there is any other change competing for the lexicon residue many result (Wang: 1969).

In Manipuri there is only one word begins with voiced sound /ɟ/ as in /ɟəgoj/ ‘dance’. Probably this /ɟ/ is derived from /s/. If the word is bifurcated into two syllable /sa/ ‘body’ + /goj/ < /koj/ ‘movement’. In such a way the word /sa+koj/ > /ɟəgoj/ ‘dance’ is formed. This theory can be postulated from the following evidence that the word /khənɟanəbə/ ‘doubt’, consist of two roots i.e. /khən/ ‘think’ + /sanəbə/ ‘play’. The philosophy is that our mind is not constant when we have any hesitation or doubt. The first attack of voiced sound in the initial position in Manipuri is the word /ɟəgoj/ ‘dance’.

In the light of the above comment we can observe that the exotic phonemes voiced sounds stops and fricatives attack as the allophones of their counterparts.

For example,

(a) k ~ g

cət + kənu > /cətəkənu/ ‘don’t go’
 go prohibitive suffix

ca + gənu > /cagənu/ 'don't eat'
 eat prohibitive suffix

(b) c ~ ɟ

cət + cəge > /cətcəge/ 'Please allow me to go'
 go suffix (polite)

pa + ɟəge > /paɟəge/ 'Please allow me to read'
 read suffix (polite)

(c) t ~ d

kəp + te > /kəpte/ 'not cry'
 cry negative suffix

ca + de > /cade/ 'not eat'
 eat negative suffix

(d) p ~ b

cət + pə > /cətpə/ 'to go'
 go infinitive suffix

ca + bə > /cabə/ 'to eat'
 eat infinitive suffix

From the given example it is vividly visible that voiced and voiceless are phonologically alternants. Since the voiced sound cannot occur initially and finally the voiced sound are later developments in Manipuri. It is also possible to conclude that in Manipuri the attack of exotic phonemes appear as an allophone and the pure Manipuri words do not begin with the voiced sound except the word /ɟəgoj/ 'dance'. The old Manipuri written documents also predicts that these voice sound were not used in old Manipuri.

BENGALI-ASSAMESE SCRIPT AND ITS IMPACT IN MANIPURI PHONEMES:

Phonemes always refer to sounds, never to spelling. The use of Bengali script in writing Manipuri ultimately creates many problems in Manipuri spelling. The present paper does not intend to provide the spelling problems of the language. The attention will be restricted to Manipuri phonemes and their corresponding Bengali letters. The number of consonant phonemes in Manipuri so far discussed is 24. However, there are 41 consonant letters in Bengali. So the presentation of Manipuri words using Bengali phonemes creates a big headache to the speakers. Manipuri phonemes represented by Bengali script are as follows.

Manipuri does not possess the retroflex sound but in writing Manipuri use the Bengali retroflex sounds without any questions whether the sound remain or not in the language. In the same case the Bengali apical /ʃ/, alveolar /s/, post alveolar /ʒ/ and retroflex /ʒ/ these four different sounds are used freely since Manipuri has only alveolar /s/. By using these different traditional consonant alphabets create a horrible in Manipuri spelling also.

In short, the representation of Manipuri phonemes by Bengali script ultimately generates many problems. Thus, consistency of spelling has not been formalized in writing Manipuri. Different writers use different spellings for the same word. Out of 41 Bengali consonant alphabets, 17 are not in used in Manipuri sound system. The government of Manipur fails to implement the 'Spelling Rules 1925 and 1969. There are some defects in the spelling rules using Bengali scripts in writing Manipuri. For example, the spelling rules do not provide to differentiate the tone variations of word scientifically. Thus, no one can follow the 'Spelling Rules'.

CONCLUSION:

Manipuri language borrows many vocabularies from different languages. Specially from Bengali, Sanskrit, Hindi and Assamese. In the initial stage, the historical account shows that Manipuri speakers could not produce the voiced sound. For

example, the word /pa g l/ 'Muslims' was articulated for 'Bangal' as the people were migrated from the Bangala (now Bangladesh). The word /guru/ was pronounced as /kuru/. But the Modern Manipuri speakers have a good interact with Indo-Aryan speakers and highly educated. It is not becoming a major problem in producing the voiced sounds.

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