

## **Syllable in Somdal, a Dialect of Tangkhul - A Preliminary Investigation**

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### **Abstract**

Somdal, also known as Shongran (endonym) is one of the dialects of Tangkhul, a Tibeto-Burman language. This dialect of Tangkhul is found spoken in a village called Somdal, which is located in west of Ukhrul district of Manipur, India. As per 2011 census, the village has a total of 468 families of 2375 persons, of which 1209 are males while 1166 are females. Of the total population, 13.14 % are in the age group of 0-6 years. The average sex ratio of the village is 964 female per 1000 male. The literacy rate of the village is 92.39%. The present paper attempts to describe the syllable structure in Somdal, which is one of the dialects of Tangkhul language.

**Key words:** Tibeto-Burman, Tangkhul, Naga, Somdal, syllable structure.

### **1. Introduction**

Somdal is one of the dialects of Tangkhul language, a Tibeto-Burman language. Like many other dialects of Northeast India, Somdal is a hitherto undescribed, undocumented and unexplored dialect of Tangkhul, which is found spoken in west of Ukhrul district, Manipur, India. Linguistically, according to the Grierson's Linguistic Survey of India Volume III part II. (1904), Tangkhul belongs to the Kuki-Chin Naga subgroup of the Tibeto-Burman family. But Benedict and Shafer (1940-1) clubbed it under the Kukish section which includes Central-Kuki, Northern-Kuki, Old-Kuki, Southern-Kuki, Northern-Naga, and Lushai. Tangkhul is also known as Luhuppa in old literatures (see Grierson's L.S.I Vol. III, part-II). It is a language which is mainly specific to the Somdal village. It is one of the numerous sub-tribes of Tangkhul. They don't have their own indigenous script and proper literature; however Roman script has been adopted to write their language with some modifications. Similarly, the dialect is not being taught in schools and colleges as a medium of instruction or as a subject.

Some of the written works done on Tangkhul are ‘Tangkhul Naga Grammar and Dictionary (Ukhrul dialect) With Illustrative Sentences’ by William Pettigrew (1918), ‘Tankhur Naga Vocabulary’ by D.N.S.Bhatt (1969), ‘Tangkhul Naga Grammar’ by S. Arokianathan (1987), ‘Tangkhul Naga and Comparative Tibeto-Burman by James A. Matisoff and ‘Comparative Tangkhul’ by David Mortensen (2003). And so far not even a single literary work has been carried out in this dialect of Tangkhul i.e. ‘Somdal’.

## **2. Theoretical Background**

Syllable is a universal feature in the structure of the languages of the world. The nucleus of a syllable is the prominent part of a syllable, or the part which (1) is the domain of phonemic pitch or stress, or (2) is the inner structural part of the syllable distinct in distributional characteristics from the marginal elements, the consonants, which precede and/or follow it (K.L. Pike, 1947:148). O’Connor,(1973:201) states that the nature of a syllable structure varies from one language to another since there is no universal phonological syllable. The phonological view of the syllable requires a separate definition for each language. However Malmberg (1963:1), among other phoneticians, believes that the syllable consisting of a consonant plus a vowel is the only one which is general for all language.

## **3. Typological Features of Somdal**

- (i) Like most of the tonal dialects of Tibeto-Burman language, Somdal is a tonal dialect.
- (ii) The basic structure of syllable in Somdal is (C)V(V)(C).
- (iii) Somdal being a dialect of Tibeto-Burman language has a nominal pronominalization i.e., the pronominal markers are attached to the nominal root in the form of prefixes and as a result it expresses the sense of possession.
- (iv) As in many other Kuki-Chin Naga languages, tense is not prominent in Somdal; rather than the aspect is frequently expressed by the verbal suffixes.
- (v) Like many other Tibeto-Burman languages, negation in Somdal is expressed by means of affixation.
- (vi) As many other South Asian Languages, the preferred order of clausal constituents in Somdal is SOV.

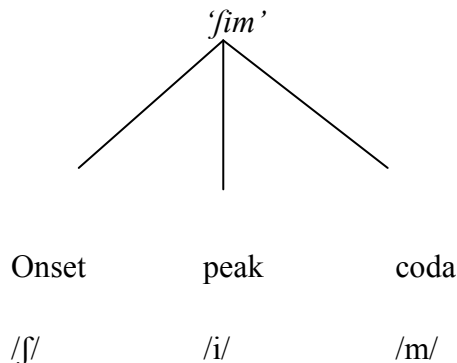
#### 4. Syllable in Somdal

In Somdal, as in most other Tibeto-Burman languages a syllable is a vocalic unit which can be preceded or followed by one or more consonantal margins. In the latter type, the vocalic unit constitutes as ‘peak’ or ‘nucleus of the syllable and all peripheral consonantal or semi-consonantal phonemes’ as its margin. A syllable may have a zero margin or a simple or complex (cluster) margin or either side of the syllable peak. The sequence can be divided into three parts; these three parts are referred to as (i) onset, the opening segment of the syllable is the onset, (ii) nucleus, the central segment of the syllable is the nucleus or peak, (iii) coda, the closing segment of the syllable is the coda. Syllable structure word can be described as under.

##### 4.1. Syllable Structure in Somdal

Syllabic structure in Somdal can be analysed as below:

*/ʃim/* which means ‘house’ in Somdal.



V structures in Somdal are found to be very rare and limited; there are only a few instances of them as shown in the following examples:

V      */i/*                      ‘I’

The CV structures are found to be common in forming the word in Somdal as shown in the following examples:

CV      */mi/*                      ‘person’

/wi/	‘mother’
/se/	‘cow’
/sa/	‘animal’
/mə/	‘dream’
/ko/	‘river’
/p <sup>h</sup> i/	‘leg’
/la/	‘song’

The CVC structures are found to be most common type of word in Somdal as shown in the following examples.

CVC	/pan/	‘hand’
	/wot/	‘work’
	/wən/	‘flower’
	/hon/	‘shirt’
	/wor/	‘swell’
	/wot/	‘work’
	/ʃim/	‘house’
	/luk/	‘basket’

The CVV structures are also found to be very rare in Somdal as shown in the following examples:

CVV	/k <sup>h</sup> ui/	‘village’
	/roi/	‘similar’
	/k <sup>h</sup> oi/	‘bee’

<i>/hoi/</i>	‘skin’
<i>/k<sup>h</sup>ai/</i>	‘fish’
<i>/pai/</i>	‘rust’
<i>/hui/</i>	‘dog’
<i>/t<sup>h</sup>ao/</i>	‘fat’
<i>/liu/</i>	‘field’

## 4.2. Open Syllables and Closed Syllables

An open syllable as defined by David Crystal (2003: p. 448) is a syllable not closed by another consonant. And in other hand a closed, which is also called checked syllable by David Crystal (2003: p. 70), is a syllable that ends at a coda position with a consonant.

### Open Syllables

In Somdal-Tangkhul open syllable can be filled by either monophthongs or diphthongs as shown in examples given below.

<i>/pi/</i>	‘earring’
<i>/mi/</i>	‘fire’
<i>/t<sup>h</sup>ao/</i>	‘fat’
<i>/vai/</i>	‘he/she’
<i>/ciu/</i>	‘tall’

### Closed syllables

In Somdal closed syllable can be taken by unaspirated stop or by nasal as shown in the example given below.

<i>/pan/</i>	‘hand’
<i>/p<sup>h</sup>ek/</i>	‘mat’

<i>/jim/</i>	‘house’
<i>/Jan/</i>	‘strength’
<i>/con/</i>	‘sister’

In addition to monosyllabic pattern illustrated above, Somdal have disyllabic, trisyllabic, tetrasyllabic, pentasyllabic, hexasyllabic words i.e. this dialect has polysyllabic structure as shown below. Below, in the examples syllabic boundary is marked by the symbol (·).

### 4.3 Permissible Syllabic Sequences in a Disyllabic Word

The disyllabic word is considered to be the most common type of word in Somdal. In Somdal, it is interesting to note that most of the different word formation systems were observed with this disyllabic word type. The following are some of the permissible syllabic sequences in disyllabic words:

V.CV	<i>/əha/</i>	‘hair’
V.CVC	<i>/ədən/</i>	‘bunch’
V.CVV	<i>/əhoi/</i>	‘skin’

### 4.4 Permissible syllabic sequences in a Trisyllabic word

In Somdal trisyllabic words are considered to be the second most commonly used words, and they include both verbs and noun. The following are some of the permissible syllabic sequences in trisyllabic words:

CVV.CV.CV	<i>/liuk<sup>h</sup>əva/</i>	‘farmer’
CV.CV.CVV	<i>/kəp<sup>h</sup>unao/</i>	‘hillock’
CV.CV.CV	<i>/kətoŋə/</i>	‘all’

### 4.5 Permissible syllabic sequences in a Tetrasyllabic word

Tetrasyllabic words in Somdal include adjective and numeral. The following are some of the examples of tetrasyllabic words with permissible syllabic sequences.

CV.CV.CV.CV	/məp <sup>h</sup> ak <sup>h</sup> əme/	‘worse’
CVV.CV.CVV.CV	/niumit <sup>h</sup> oiwi/	‘youngest’
CVC.CV.CVV.CV	/tokmit <sup>h</sup> oiwi/	‘biggest’

#### 4.6 Permissible syllabic sequences in a Pentasyllabic word

There are few words with pentasyllabic in Somdal. The following are some of the permissible syllabic sequences in pentasyllabic words:

CVC.CV.CV.CVV.CV	/tokmikət <sup>h</sup> oija/	‘biggest of all’
CVV.CV.CV.CVV.CV	/suimikət <sup>h</sup> oija/	‘shortest of all’

#### 4.7 Permissible syllabic sequences in a Hexasyllabic word

CVC.CVC.CV.CVV.CVC.CVV	/ribribkəbautət <sup>h</sup> ui/	‘chant’
CVC.CV.CV.CVV.CV.CVV	/ratcikəpaik <sup>h</sup> uk <sup>h</sup> ui/	‘grab’

#### Conclusion

From the above presentation, it can be concluded that like many other Tibeto-Burman languages, syllable in Somdal is a vocalic unit which can be preceded or followed by one or more consonantal margins. In the latter type the vocalic unit constitutes as ‘peak’ or ‘nucleus of the syllable and all peripheral consonantal or semi-consonantal phonemes’ as its margin. A syllable may have a zero margin or a simple or complex (cluster) margin or either side of the syllable peak. The sequence can be divided into three parts, these three parts are referred to as (i) onset, the opening segment of the syllable is the onset, (ii) nucleus, the central segment of the syllable is the nucleus or peak, (iii) coda, the closing segment of the syllable is the coda.

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#### Abbreviations

V	Vowel
C	Consonant
SOV	Subject Object Verb

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