

LANGUAGE IN INDIA
Strength for Today and Bright Hope for Tomorrow
Volume 11 : 6 June 2011
ISSN 1930-2940

Managing Editor: M. S. Thirumalai, Ph.D.

Editors: B. Mallikarjun, Ph.D.

Sam Mohanlal, Ph.D.

B. A. Sharada, Ph.D.

A. R. Fatihi, Ph.D.

Lakhan Gusain, Ph.D.

Jennifer Marie Bayer, Ph.D.

S. M. Ravichandran, Ph.D.

G. Baskaran, Ph.D.

L. Ramamoorthy, Ph.D.

Socio-Linguistic Paradigm of the Aimol

Khawlsongkim Suantak, Ph. D. Scholar

=====
Abstract

Language as a socio-cultural phenomenon has a deep underlying relationship with the society. Correspondingly, the Aimol language is examined in the backdrop of the socio-linguistic ecosystem in which the speakers live, the language is spoken, the context and situation in which it is used. Further, this article also explains the typological features of the language.

Ethnography- A Short Historical Sketch

The Aimols, recognized as one of the Scheduled Tribes of the Indian Union, inhabit three districts in Manipur. Etymologically the name *Aimol* corresponds to a past habitat of the people whereby the term is derived from the word, 'Ai' denoting 'wild turmeric', which is found in abundance in the hill 'Mol'. Thus, Aimol owe its name to such historic mark and is thereafter believed to be known as 'Aimol'. Among other things, the Aimols trace their origin to *Khur*, a mythical cave or passage through which all Kuki tribes are said to have emerged from a netherworld. This place is believed to be somewhere in the Southern part of Myanmar bordering China. In fact, some even disagree to this proposition and allege that they must have migrated from the eastern part of China.

Diverse views were set by different scholars regarding the passage of the Aimols. According to Shakespear (1912: 149), the Aimols make their first appearance in the Manipur Chronicle in 1723. Pemberton writes of the "Imole" route from Manipur to Kubo (1835: 56); and Johnstone, following what is apparently the same route to the Kabaw Valley, mentions "Aimole, a village . . . inhabited by a tribe of that name" in the mountains to the east of Palel (1896:121). The map in the *Linguistic Survey of India* shows them in the hills to the east of Shugunu, and to the north of the area inhabited by the Purum (Grierson 1904). Shakespear's map locates them in the same general area, but rather further to the north (1912).

The bulk of them are more recently reported in the Palel area to the east of the Logtak Lake, but the largest village, Kha Aimol, is near Bishenpore, on the western side (Bose 1934a: 17; 1934b :8). E.W. Dun (1886) described the hilly village of the Aimol on the *Tuisarok river* as "the Aimol village at the Aimol peak" and the nearby pathway approaching to Kabaw valley as "the Aimol Pass".

In the 1931 Census of India, they numbered 501 individuals, of whom 270 were male and 231 female (Mullan 1932:262). According to the estimate of the Aimol Tribe Union, Manipur in 1995, their population was about 3,300 but the 1981 census indicated their population as being 1862. Currently, the total population of Aimol is recorded at 3,643 (Census Report, 2001).

Concentration of the People

The Aimol of Manipur is one of a number of related tribes known in the literature as Kuki. Though numerically insignificant, the Aimols constitute a distinct group. Despite this observation, the Aimols are composed of two closely related groups: *Sutpong* and *Khurai*. Linguistically, the two groups do not display much difference but possess certain distinctiveness of their own. Such distinction is also further typified by the demographic settlement of the group. It was only believed that the dual epos of migration just before their entry into India could have dispersed the group. Thereafter, some sections are believed to have moved towards Mizoram and Tripura.¹

Today the Aimols are mainly concentrated in Chandel district of Manipur and occupy foothill areas bordering the valley in the southeastern part. No doubt, Aimol settlements are also evident in Churachandpur and Senapati districts of the state, though insignificant. The villages wherein the Aimols are mostly distributed are Sibong-Khudengthabi (Sutpong), Unapal, Satu, Kumbirei, Chingnunghut, Aimol Tampak, Aimol Khullen, Khunjai, Khodamphai, Ngairong, Chandonpokpi in Chandel District and Kha-Aimol, Loichulbung village in Churachandpur district and Tuikhang in Senapati district. Of these, the Sutpong speaking groups inhabit Sibong-Khudengthabi, Satu, Unapal, Kumbirei, Tampak, Kha-Aimol, Tuikhang and Loichulbung.

The distribution pattern reflects that the tribe does not occupy a well-defined territory. However, most of the villages inhabited by the *Khurais* are contiguous to one another, but the villages settled by the *Sutpong* groups are scattered. Of all the villages, even today Sibong-Khudengthabi is venerated as a historical root of migration and as the first settlement of Aimols after their arrival in India. Besides this, the village also marks a historical credence of being existed during

the reign of King Tikendrajit. Perhaps and basically being a base and root of migration, the present day inhabitants of this village are comparatively untouched and less influenced by external linguistic exigencies.

Social System

The Aimol society exhibits a patriarchal and patronymic feature of society. Linguistically the Aimols are characterized by dual variation: *Sutpong* and *Khurai*. Furthermore, the tribe is divided into 5 main clans, which are further sub-divided into sub-clans. The clans are: 1. Chongom (with 3 sub-clans) 2. Laita (3 sub-clans) 3. Lanu (4 sub-clans) 4. Chaithu (no sub-clan) and 5. Shongthu (2 sub-clans). Though not restricted, Aimol villages are often clan-based. As such, Unapal, Satu, Kha-Aimol and Sibong-Khudengthabi are Chongom villages, Kumbirei, a Chaithu village, and Tampak, a Lanu village.

The Aimol clans possess totems of their own, which are associated with their ancestry. Of the clans mentioned above - Chongom, Chaithu and Lanu belong to *Sutpong* dialect group. Although the history of migration of the *Khurais* remains obscure, yet there is a widely accepted view that the *Sutpong* migrated from Myanmar (Burma), tracing their first settlement in Sibong-Khudengthabi (also popularly known by the name *Sutpong* itself) in India which then migrated upward to the present day Saivom and Pallel areas.

Typically, the Aimols are unique in their naming system. Names of persons are ascribed keeping in view the clan the persons belong to. However, it does not strictly imply that names of persons necessarily connote the clan. Though not in all cases, some terms connote the clan attachment. For instance, if a name bears or starts with '*Rui*', it is understood that the bearers belongs to Chongom clan. Similarly, '*Sum*' is understood as belonging to the 'Chaithu' clan.

Traditional House

The traditional house of the Aimol resembles that of the Meiteis, Purum, Kom, Chiru, Chothe, Koireng, Kharam, etc., in that they live in close proximity with one another. The houses are of box type with slanting crest roof, basically made of wood, bamboo and mud. The roofing material used is thatch. Around the dwelling place, one will notice satellite sheds generally used as granary storehouse, cattle shed and piggery. The direction of houses is always towards the east, facing the rising sun. Now, bricks and other different kinds of sophisticated materials are used for construction.

Inheritance

In the case of property inheritance, the eldest son of the family inherits the parent's property. Moreover, in case of succession to the post of *Kamsakoi*, the eldest son within the family is considered legitimate. Woman has no right to inherit or to succeed. However, a divorced woman who has returned to her natal residence is allowed to live with her male siblings. Here, although women are strictly restricted to succeed their parents for the post of *Kamsakoi* but can inherit their parents' property in case there is no legitimate son to inherit. No matter what women are,

considers illegitimate for the post of *Kamsakoi* and are normally transfers to the closest male kin of the deceased.

Marriage

The Aimol society is a patrilineal society where the descent goes to the male line. In this patriarchal and patronymic society, monogamy is the common form of marriage. Normally, a man is required to serve his father-in-law-to-be for three years as a tribute during which he would work for him and be treated as a son in the family. Locally, this practice is known as '*nuhmei hluah*'. In most cases, when the girl attains the age of fifteen or sixteen she is considered nubile. Thereafter, marriage ceremony is solemnized as per the custom. The bride's eldest brother gets Rs.6 and each of the others one rupee less than his immediate senior. The paternal and maternal uncle receive Rs.2 each, the aunt and the elder sister also receive Rs.1 each as *niman* and *nao-puan-puk-man*. Today, though certain aspects of marriage traditions are still adhered to but the practice of '*nuhmei hluah*' is no longer practiced. However, even today the price of the bride remains the same. This continuation is considered as a means of preserving the age-old customary practice of the society.

Marriage in Aimol is exemplified by two categorizations depending on the nature and adherence to prescribed values: elopement known as *moiruk*, and another is engagement locally known as *moibiak*. Engagement is revered as a sacred marriage whereby it is generally solemnized in congruence with Christian faith. Under this, both the spouses' need the parents' consent to proceed with the engagement procedures. Today, as a mark of cultural attachment and preserving the age-old values, a kettle of tea (a jar of rice beer locally known as '*vaiju*' before the advent of Christianity) is considered as an obligation to fulfill the norm of engagement. Thereafter, approximately after one year marriage is often solemnized.

Marriage may also occur through elopement. Basically, this type of marriage occurs when the lovers fail to get their parents' consensus. In this case, after a month of elopement the boy side is usually asked to slaughter a full-grown cow, buffalo, or pig to serve the girl's village as a mark of fine for demoralizing cultural and religious norms. This is done after one or two months after elopement. Thus, norms, cultural interpretations, etc. in Aimol marriage are lucidly outlined by the two categorizations set forth.

Kinship Terms: Its Use and Intensity

The Aimol kinship network was divided into two sets of relatives, the first set of relatives is set through the *pa-inkuo* 'father's descent' and the second is set through the *nu-inkuo* 'mother descent'. This division and variations is replicated throughout the entire kinship down to the distant circle of the personal kindred. The Aimol family is the smallest type of consanguine kin group, the members of whom believed to trace their common ancestral origin. The patrilineal clan is traced out through the father side. Even today, the Aimol tribe maintains a mutual kinship or cognitive ties and there is unity among the clans. Practically this is witnessed through the helping of one another for any ceremony within the same clan. This indicated a shared strong kinship tie, which helped them to maintain firm and cohesive unity.

Besides these, interaction and identification among the people is highly courteous. Generally, an address to an elderly person is mostly taken care of whereby a person who may or may not be close to your family lineage is address with honorific prefixes such as ‘*u*’ ‘*pa*’ ‘*nu*’ ‘*pu*’ and ‘*pi*’. These prefixes symbolize a mark of respect and honor. The prefixes mentioned above are used towards elderly persons. ‘*U*’ is a general term meaning brother or sister assumed to be older, ‘*pa*’ as uncle or father, ‘*nu*’ as aunty or mother. Similarly ‘*pu*’ stands for uncle or grandfather and ‘*pi*’ denotes grandmother or similar to that of madam as in English. In fact, ‘*pu*’ and ‘*pi*’ may sometimes be not necessarily employed to signify an elderly person, wherein it is used to address a person with honor, respect and dignity in social domains or platforms.

On the other, the case is strictly followed if these remarks are to occur within a closer group of people: within the family, clan or lineage. Comparatively, these prefixes are strictly adhered to among closer categories. Unlike as mentioned above, the employment of each prefix connotes certain family relationship. For instance, ‘*pa*’, ‘*pu*’, ‘*pi*’ and ‘*nu*’ are strictly designated in the right places and to the right persons. Here, ‘*pa*’ and ‘*nu*’ are used to addressed one’s father, mother, uncle, or aunty. Similar is the case of other terms. Other terms that do not find a place in loose domains are ‘*ni*’ and ‘*rang*’. ‘*Ni*’ is a term strictly used toward one’s father’s sister and ‘*rang*’ to one’s father’s sister’s husband. Here, terms like ‘*pu*’ and ‘*pi*’ are only addressed towards one’s grandfather, grandmother, maternal uncle and aunty. One highly remarkable courteous term is ‘*u*’. Generally, ‘*u*’ stands for elder brother or sister. However, the same term may also be used towards one’s elder brother’s wife or elder sister’s husband. In such instances, ‘*u*’ does not strictly signify someone older to you. Most importantly, although the use of terms in the general domain allows to certain extent the replacement of terms like ‘*nu*’ instead of ‘*ni*’ is permissible so long as it conforms the gender specificity, but, within much closer categories, the employment of terms denotes the right place of use and persons. Thus, Aimol society exhibits a high degree of adherence to cultural ethics in the use of kinship terms.

Polity

The indigenous mode of political organization of a village centers around the council known as *Pasakariat* (elected eight males). *Pasakariat* consists of eight councilors of which the head is *Kamsakoi*.² Apart from these elected councilors, *Kamsakoi* administers the village. Like all other Kuki tribes, the post of ‘*Kamsakoi*’ is heredity among the Aimols unlike the post of *Pasakariat*. Ethnologically, and based on the widely perceived agreed notion, Chongom clan is basically revered as a king or chief’s clan. This is similar to the case of Sailo clan among the Lushai speakers before it was abolished recently. *Kamsakoi* remains as the exclusive right of the eldest son as a successor.

Despite the perceived notion of cultural homogeneity of the Aimol society, over the years this traditional polity has undergone remarkable change and difference. Although the hereditary post of *Kamsakoi* was considers inherent, this system of traditional administration over the years in *Khurai* villages has been considerably diluted. That is to say, this inherent system of succession continues only among the *Sutpongs*. Today, the *Khurais* have adopted a more liberal and democratic system where periodical elections are held to elect person(s) for various post in the village administration.

Linguistic Affiliation of the Language

Linguistically, the Aimols do not display much difference with the Kom, Chiru, Koireng, Kharam and Chothe of Manipur. In other parts of the country, the Aimols resemble the Bietes, Hmar, Mizo (Lushai), Hrangkhawl and Darlong. Their traditional clothes, folk tales, beliefs, history of origin, and language exhibit high resemblance with the groups mentioned above. Though not intelligibly close the group exhibit high lexical similarities with the Lamkangs, Moyons and Monsangs. Some of the tribes mentioned above have claimed affiliation with the Nagas. However, the Aimols prefer to live independent of any affiliation and prefer to maintain a distinct identity of their own.

The ethnic affinity of the Aimol has been placed amidst most of the neighboring tribes of southern part of Manipur bordering Burma and the Lushai. They have been classified as belonging to one of Kuki-Chin-Mizo (Lushai) language family. Specifically, they are categorized as the Old Kuki branch of Kuki section-Burmic division of Sino-Tibetan Language. G. A. Grierson in his *Linguistic Survey of India* (vol. III, part III) classified Aimol under the customary name of Old Kuki, which includes Rangkhoh, Bete, Halam, Langrong, Chiru, Kolren, Kom, Cha, Mhar, Anal, Haloi-Lamkang and Vaiphei. He also described Aimol and other languages that constitute Old Kukis as mere dialects of same language. He further states that these languages are closely related to the central Chin languages.

According to Grierson, the original old Kuki tribe seems to have lived in the Lushai hills, from where they were driven out by the Thadous. Aimol, no doubt has some language affinities with the Lushai of Mizoram, the Hmar of Manipur and the Hrangkhawl of Tripura. McCulloch lists the Aimol particularly with the Kom, Koireng, Chote, Purum, and Mantak (1859:64-5) tribes which he describes as being in their personal appearance "all much alike", while in their customs "there is no striking difference".

Due to scanty works on the language, it is difficult to get the proper division or classification of this language. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that Aimol is one of the Tibeto-Burman languages which has the language affinities with the languages like Hmar, Hrangkhawl, Malsom, Darlong and Lushai apart from Koireng, Purum, Chothe, Chiru, and Kom. The following is the classification of Kuki-Chin by Grierson (1904).

|

Kuki-Chin Branch

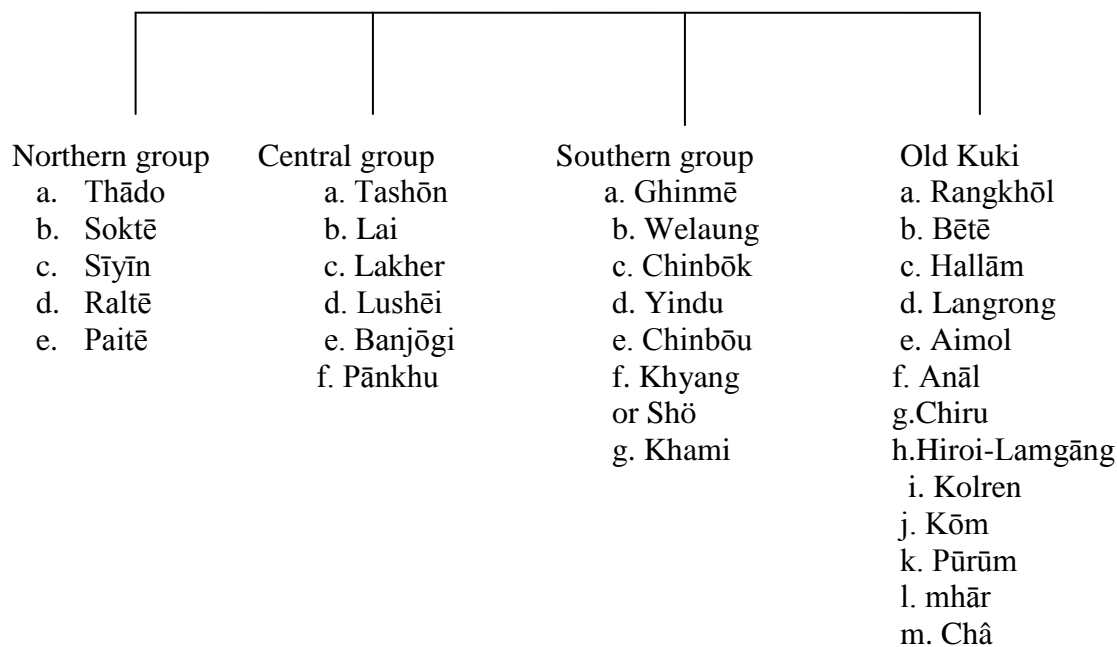


Fig 1: Classification of Kuki-Chin languages (Grierson 1904)

Dialectal Variation

As it was mentioned earlier, the Aimol language has two varieties viz, Sutpong and Khurai, which can be attributed to the migration patterns. Although the two varieties exhibit slight difference in their speech, there are, however, no incongruities in their traditional systems. These dialects are completely mutually intelligible and that the main differences between them are purely lexical and phonological. There is also significant difference in elocution between the two dialects. The use of glottal stops in the word ending preceded by a vowel sound is prominent among the Sutpong speakers while in Khurai dialect the occurrence is very limited. Words with the initial nasalized sound in Sutpong dialect is omitted by the Khurai speakers. In this paper, the words and sentences are based on Sutpong dialect. The Khurai speakers borrowed several words from the neighbouring Meitei speakers and the presence of loanwords in Sutpong dialect is also not an exception. Table below presents a list of some lexical and phonological differences between the two dialects.

SUTPONG	KHURAI	
Lexical/phonological	Lexical/phonological	Gloss
loʔ	lui	‘take’
Loi	lui	‘field’
m8eʔ	me	‘meat’
tseʔ	tse	‘go’
Em	mɔ	‘interrogative particle’

haŋ	raŋ	‘purposive particle’
r8at	rat	‘strong’
l8a	la	‘song’
suŋna	ɔŋna	‘chair’

Table 1: Illustration of the variation in lexical and phonological in the dialects of Sutpong and Khurai.

Linguistically, the Sutpong and Khurai dialects do not exhibit much of differences. Although one takes pride in belonging to a Sutpong speech category, yet in contrast, the group belonging to Khurai fails to eschew the attachment but prefers to refute and be called as simply Aimol. This displeasure is widely believed to be due to multiple and unsavory interpretation of the term ‘Khurai’. It is also noticed that the Khurai dialect speaking group has various borrowed words and thus the term ‘*Pautinchom*’ is designated to them which means ‘assortment of tongues’ by the Sutpong dialect speaking groups. Between these two dialects, the Sutpong dialect is regarded as pure and standardized and it is widely used in the literature and written form.

Linguistic Environment

As it was said before, the Aimols were found to live in a compact area in which their villages are adjacent to one another, but outside their language area, different speakers of other cognate Kuki-Chin languages and the Meitei language surround them. The conversation between these different linguistic groups is done in the Meiteilon, which is the lingua franca of the state. There does not seem to be any influence of the Kuki-Chin languages on Aimol even though their languages are closely related. They are not mutually intelligible. However, a slight lexical and phonological similarity is found. On the other hand, the influence of Meitei language is found to be great. As a result, almost all the Aimol speakers are articulate well in the language. This eventually led to borrowing of Meitei lexical items and has become a part of their day-to-day usage. The main reason for this borrowing is due to the language contact that came through education, or what might be called ‘learned contact’ and other reasons can be through language contact as in commercial places like market, etc. Ironically, due to high degree of borrowed words, there are several terms of such even in the Bible. As Meiteilon or Manipuri was the official language of the state and seeing that their language was not included in the Major Indian Languages (MIL), Manipuri language have to be learnt by Aimol students as a second language in the school. Consequently, their knowledge of Manipuri influenced them to code-mixing in their conversation and thus subsequently borrowed words were and are nativized it. The Aimols are bilingual in the true sense of the word by seeing their milieu and their language co-existing alongside of other languages and it is quite natural that they considerably borrow words from the dominant language like the Manipuri. However, this borrowing was limited only to the lexicon and no influence is found at the syntactic level.

The following are some of the borrowed words gradually replacing the original Aimol words:

Manipuri	Aimol	Gloss
Laishang	Biekin	‘church’
Thagat	Paak	‘praise’
Shuman	Ranak	‘wages’
Prathana	Darna	‘pray’
Unpot	Phurchawi	‘dowry’
Khudak	Atun-tun	‘at the moment’
Lairik	Lekha	‘book’
Tarik	Nikhuo	‘date’

Language Status

Recently, United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in its report of the world’s languages in danger, 2009, mentioned that some major tribal languages of Manipur have been enlisted as extinct languages whilst some other languages as endangered. Surprisingly, Aimol was listed as one of the extinct languages of Manipur. This report made by the UNESCO is happily based on incorrect information and the Aimol language is very much alive and immensely used by its speakers.

Regarding the status of the language for educational purposes, Aimol has yet to find its berth among the languages included in the Modern Indian Languages (MIL) of Manipur, equal to the status of other MIL languages. However, to ensure a successful implementation of vernacular education policy, it is important that preparations in terms of proper awareness programs take place at the community level because implementation of such policies will inevitably involve the participation of the community.

Contexts of Use and Language

Even though they are numerically insignificant, yet the tendency of self-assertion found among the Aimols acts as the reason for sustaining their language. The Aimol people maintain their mother tongue by preserving it in certain domains even if they use some loan words in their everyday life. Home is the most important domain for them for language maintenance and the use of other language is not encouraged by them. Religion is another domain for their language maintenance. All kinds of religious activities are performed in their language and thus articles published by the church play a major role in maintaining the language. Interestingly, Bible that was translated recently in Aimol could be a valuable translation vis-à-vis in maintaining the essence of their language. Regarding the institutional support, the Aimol is neither used as a medium of instruction nor taught as a subject in schools. Since their language is not used in institutions, their learning of Manipuri language in the schools assumes the role as the learning of a second language. In spite of lack of institutional support, they retain their mother tongue. Their print media also helps them to maintain their language. They publish a weekly newspaper and church articles in their language. Public speeches and any kind of meetings within their society are always conducted in Aimol. Apart from these domains, when there is a situation like interaction with other language groups, the common language used by them is Manipuri. Sometimes Hindi or English are also used. But most of the time, the Aimols switch over to

Manipuri language in situations like market, public places like banks, post offices, government offices, etc., as majority of employees are Manipuri speakers. The Aimols have a positive attitude towards their language and this plays a very important role in maintaining their language. The use of other languages occurs only when there are limited options. In fact, the Aimols do not have negative attitude towards the majority languages although they resort to the monopoly use of their language both at home and at interaction within community members. In other words, they do not esteem and venerate other languages than their own.

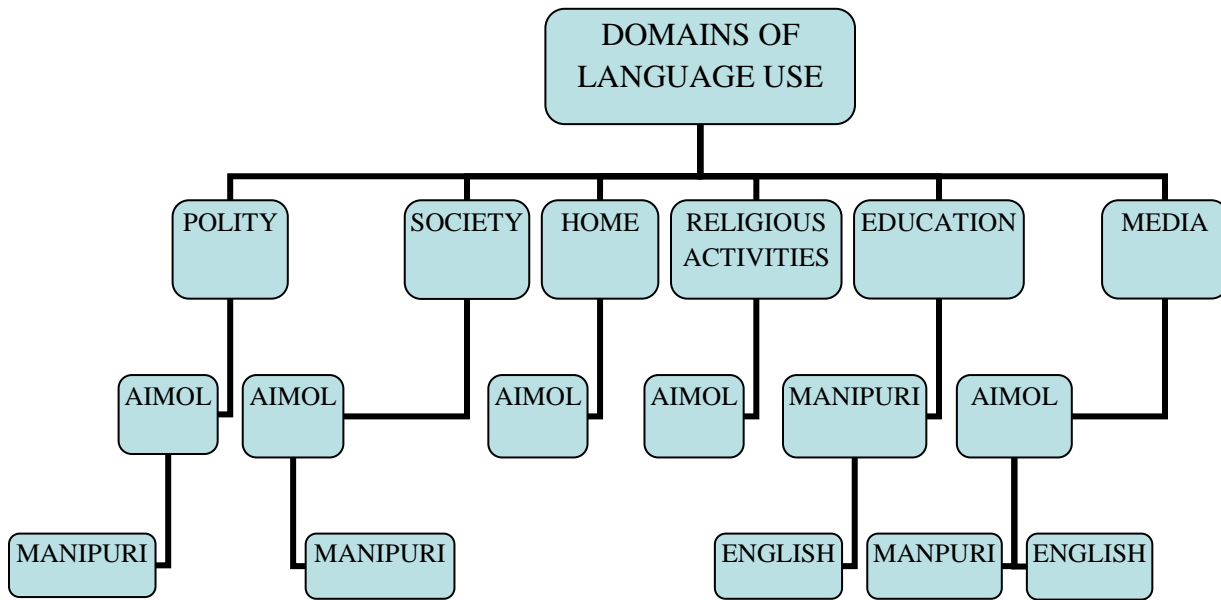


Fig 2: Domains of Language Use by the Aimol

Some Typological Features of Aimol

(i) Aimol like any other Tibeto-Burman languages has subject+object+verb (SOV) word order i.e., the verb occurs in the final position. Consider the following example.

Kei bu ka nek
 1SG food 1SG eat
 'I am eating food.'

(ii) The language has postposition instead of preposition.

suŋ -na chuŋ a?
 chair NOM above LOC
 'On the chair'

(iii) Aimol is a pro-drop language.

kei ka che? hang
 1SG 1SG go FUT
 'I am going'

Ø ka che? hang
Ø 1SG go FUT
'I am going'

(iv) The genitive precedes the governing noun. Genitive is indicated by word order in which the possessor precedes the possessed item as in

ka lekha
1SG book
'my book'

(v) It is a tonal language. Pitch plays a role in differentiating the meaning.

mái 'face'
mài 'pumpkin'

(vi) Reduplication is found in the language. Both full and complete reduplication are present.

yam yam che? ro?
walk slowly

(vii) Echo-word formation is another features found in the language.

(viii) In comparative constructions, the marker of comparison follows the standard of comparison.

akim alal niak a? asaŋ dət
Akim Alal than 3SG tall COMP MKR
'Akim is taller than Alal'

(ix) In Aimol, indirect object (IO) precedes the direct object (DO).

areŋ niŋ k^hup lairik a piek
Areng ERG IO DO 3SG give
'Areng gave a book to Khup'

(x) The adjective follows the noun.

Dəŋma məlsət
damsel Beautiful
'Beautiful damsel'

(xi) Numeral is both cardinal and ordinal.

ənkhat 'one'	karuk	'six'
ənŋi 'two'	sari?	'seven'
ənthum 'three'	kariat	'eight'
mənli 'four'	kua	'nine'
raŋa 'five'	səm	'ten'

In most of the Kuki-Chin languages ordinals are derived by affixing –na. In Aimol the ordinal is also derived by suffixing –na.

ənkhātna ‘first’

ənnina ‘second’

ənthumna ‘third’

Conclusion

The Aimol language has a small speaking population, yet has continued to be active for a long time in spite of its use in mostly personal domains and intra-tribal communication. However, the scenario of the Aimol language may change because of the various reasons at different points with time and space. Today researchers need to create more awareness and political will to address this important issue, as these indigenous languages and cultures are seen national assets. However, lack of linguistic work done with the help of community fieldworkers to document their language and research is one of the constraints faced.

In view of the fact that the vitality of the language depends mostly on the users, the users should come to the fore for strengthening their mother tongue. For instance, every village Chief should play a crucial role in representing the traditional governing system that has a constitutional mandate to make recommendations for the preservation and promotions of languages and cultures. Here addressing this issue should not be focused only on the retention, use and development of indigenous languages, but should include the preservation of the traditional systems through which language functions. The work should ensure the maintenance of the traditional systems and the natural habitat and eco-systems as a means to the preservation of languages at the community level. As it is believed that language reflects these systems, practices and habitats, once these systems cease to exist, the language allied with these also cease to exist.

Most importantly, it is pertinent for the Aimol people to take pride in using their language otherwise their linguistic identity might be at risk in the long run. It must be remember that once linguistic distinctiveness and identity continues to remain frail, the whole notion of existing as distinct ethno-linguistic entity may be jeopardized. Perhaps, such trends of assimilation and identity expose to risk are more prone in situations characterized by minority settlements contiguous to majority, yet it is imperative to understand that language is the core essence of identity. Herein, scholars and civil society belonging to Aimol tribe should be sentient about such threats and possible implications.

Colophon:

The article is made possible from informal discussion that the author has had with Alal Chongom and Kh. Akhup as informants drawn from both the dialect groups. Particularly, the informations on the language studied here have been gathered from the discussion; so, is the formulation on the argument that aims at understanding the dialects of Aimol language.

1. Even today, the settlements of Aimols are found in Namphalong - a commercial town in Myanmar bordering Moreh in India. Based on oral traditions (folk songs), it is revealed that some sections moved further as compared to some who preferred to move just a short distance upward, probably assumed to be the present day Sibong-Khudengthabi (Sutpong) village which presently borders Myanmar. Sibong-Khudengthabi is believed to be the first settlement of the Aimols after their arrival in India. Since most of the major clans like Chongom, Chaithu and Lanu established their first settlement here, the land is rather identified as Sutpong. Thereafter, groups who owe their attachment to this land are designated as ‘*Sutpongs*’. Today, among the Aimols, *Sutpongs* stands for both the group of people and the land. Interestingly, the village is recognised as one among the oldest villages in the records of Manipur government.

2. *Kamsakoi* is a local term denoting the head or chief of a village.

=====

References

Bradley, David, 1997, “Tibeto-Burman languages and classification” in: Bradley, David (ed.), *Tibeto-Burman languages of the Himalayas*, Canberra: Australian national University, [Pacific Linguistics Series A, 86; Paper in Southeast Asian Linguistics 14].

Bose, J. K., 1934a, “Social Organisation of the Aimol Kukis”, *Journal Department of Letters*, University of Calcutta 25.

.....1934b, “The Religion of the Aimol Kukis”, *Man in India* 14: 1—14.

Dun, E.W., 1986, *The Gazetteers of Manipur*.

Grierson, G. A., 1904, *Linguistic Survey of India*, Vol.3, Part: 3, Government Publication, Calcutta.

Johnstone, James, 1896, *My Experiences in Manipur and the Naga Hills*, London.

Mullan, C. S., 1932, *Census of India*, 1931, vol. 3: Assam, Part II-Tables, Shillong.

Pemberton, R. Boileau, 1835, *Report on the Eastern Frontier of British India*, Calcutta.

Suantak, Khawlsongkim, 2008, Phonological Variation in Vaiphei and English: An Analysis of Errors Made by the Vaiphei Speakers in Learning English as Second Language, *Paper presented at the National Seminar on “Phonology, Vocabulary, Literature and Culture in Language Teaching in the NE Context”* organized by the NERIE-NCERT, Shillong.

Shakespeare, J., 1912, *The Lushei Kuki Clans*, London.

Fill, Alwin & Peter Mühlhäusler (ed.), 2001, *The Ecolinguistics Reader: Language, Ecology and Environment*, London: Continuum.

Khawlsongkim Suantak, Ph. D. Scholar
Department of Linguistics
North-Eastern Hill University
Mawlai
Shillong 793022
Meghalaya, India
skimvaiphei@gmail.com