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Syllable Structure in Hmar

Elangbam Sharatkumar Singh, Ph.D.

Abstract

This paper highlights the syllable structure in Hmar. Hmar belongs to Tibeto-Burman language family (Grierson, 1904). It is one of the recognized languages among the scheduled tribes of the state of Manipur. This language is spoken by the Hmar people. They are mainly concentrated in Churachandpur district of Manipur. Some small villages are also scattered in Jiribam sub division of Imphal East district. Besides these, other villages outside Manipur are also scattered over a vast area comprising of northern Mizoram, Cachar district of Assam and Chittangong hill tracts of Bangladesh.

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Syllable Structure in Hmar

A syllable can be analyzed into: segments of syllable (onset, peak, and coda). Examples: onset - /k^hut/ ‘hand’, /kum/ ‘year’, peak - /səm/ ‘hair’, /mit/ ‘eye’, and coda - /kel/ ‘goat’, /lai/ ‘navel’ etc., structure of syllable (open and close), examples: /lu/ ‘head’, /ŋa/ ‘fish’, etc., syllabic pattern (V, VC, VCV, CV, CVC, CCV and CCVC), structural restrictions of syllable (both onset and coda restriction, onset restriction and coda restriction) and syllabifications (monosyllabic, disyllabic, trisyllabic, quadrisyllabic and pentasyllabic).

Key words: Syllable, segments, structure, pattern and syllabification.

Syllable

“A syllable is a group of sounds which is made with a single puff of air. According to this approach each syllable is produced by a chest pulse, single puff of air from the lungs through the vocal tract.” (Sloat et al. 1978). In Hmar a syllable can be discussed in five ways:

- a. Segments of syllable,
- b. Structure of syllable,
- c. Syllabic pattern,
- d. Structural restriction of syllable and,
- e. Syllabification.

Segments of Syllable

A syllable can be segmented into three parts according to their initial, medial and final positions of the consonants and vowels. They are discussed one by one as below:

1. Onset,
2. Peak and,
3. Coda.

1. Onset - Onset is the syllable which begins with a consonant phoneme.

Hmar	Gloss
1. /səm/	“hair”

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- | | | |
|----|---------------------|---------|
| 2. | /k ^h ut/ | “hand” |
| 3. | /luŋ/ | “stone” |

2. Peak - Peak is the syllable which includes a vowel phoneme in the medial position.

- | | | |
|----|-------|---------|
| | Hmar | Gloss |
| 4. | /boŋ/ | “cow” |
| 5. | /kel/ | “goat” |
| 6. | /lai/ | “navel” |

3. Coda - Coda is the syllables which end with a consonant phoneme just after the peak (vowel).

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|----|-------|----------|
| | Hmar | Gloss |
| 7. | /hun/ | “time” |
| 8. | /hun/ | “banana” |
| 9. | /səm/ | “hair” |

Structure of Syllable

Structure of a syllable can be divided into two types as:

1. Open syllable and
2. Close syllable.

1. **Open syllable** - Open syllable is a syllable which concludes a vowel phoneme just after the onset (consonant). Examples:

- | | | |
|-----|------|---------|
| | Hmar | Gloss |
| 10. | /ŋa/ | “fish” |
| 11. | /ha/ | “teeth” |
| 12. | /lu/ | “head” |

2. **Close syllable** - Close syllable is a syllable which concludes a consonant phoneme just after the peak. Examples:

	Hmar	Gloss
13.	/kut/	“hand”
14.	/kum/	“year”
15.	/səm/	“hair”

Syllabic Pattern

There are seven types of syllabic patterns in Hmar. Here “C” stands for consonant phonemes and “V” stands for vowel phonemes. They are as given below:

1. V pattern,
2. VC pattern,
3. VCV pattern,
4. CV pattern,
5. CVC pattern,
6. CCV pattern and,
7. CCVC pattern.

1. Vowel (V) pattern

	Hmar	Gloss
16.	/ə/	“his/her (3PP.)”
17.	/o/	“yes”
18.	/u/	“brother / sister (ELD.)”

2. Vowel consonant (VC) pattern

	Hmar	Gloss
19.	/əl/	“saline”
20.	/ek/	“dung”
21.	/in/	“house”

3. Vowel-consonant-vowel (VCV) pattern

	Hmar	Gloss
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22.	/əma/	“she/he, it”
23.	/imu/	“sleeping (N.)”
24.	/ole/	“crocodile”

4. Consonant-vowel (CV) pattern

	Hmar	Gloss
25.	/lu/	“head”
26.	/pe/	“to give”
27.	/ci/	“salt”

5. Consonant-vowel-consonant (CVC) pattern

	Hmar	Gloss
28.	/kel/	“goat”
29.	/pil/	“clay”
30.	/som/	“ten”

6. Consonant-consonant-vowel (CCV) pattern

	Hmar	Gloss
31.	/t ^h ra/	“detach”
32.	/tlu/	“devil”
33.	/tri/	“dread”

7. Consonant-consonant-vowel-consonant (CCVC) pattern

	Hmar	Gloss
34.	/hlom/	“lump”
35.	/hril/	“to narrate”
36.	/t ^h leŋ/	“dish”

Structural Restrictions of Syllable

Structural restriction of syllable can be divided into three types as:

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1. Both onset and coda restriction,
2. Onset restriction and,
3. Coda restriction.

1. Both onset and coda restriction: In this type of restriction, the syllable is made by a peak only.

	Hmar	Gloss
37.	/ə/	“colour”
38.	/o/	“yes”
39.	/u/	“brother / sister (ELD.)”

2. Onset restriction: In onset restriction, the syllable is made with a peak and a coda.

	Hmar	Gloss
40.	/ek/	“dung”
41.	/in/	“house”
42.	/oŋ/	“hole”

3. Coda restriction: In coda restriction, the syllable is made by an onset and a peak.

	Hmar	Gloss
43.	/ŋa/	“fish”
44.	/nu/	“mother”
45.	/sa/	“animal”

Combination of Onset Plus Peak and Coda

In this combination the syllable is made with onset plus peak and coda. Examples:

	Hmar	Gloss
46.	/kut/	“hand”
47.	/kel/	“goat”
48.	/pil/	“clay”

Syllabifications

“Syllabification is the term which refers to the division of a word into syllables.” (Crystal, 1985). In Hmar, it can be classified into five types. The syllabic boundary is represented by dash (-) in the examples.

1. Monosyllabic,
2. Disyllabic,
3. Trisyllabic,
4. Quadrisyllabic and,
5. Pentasyllabic.

1. Monosyllabic - Monosyllabic is a word containing a single syllable.

	Hmar	Gloss
49.	/hun/	“time”
50.	/jiek/	“to write”
51.	/mot/	“banana”

2. Disyllabic - It is a word containing two syllables.

	Hmar	Gloss
52.	/in-t ^h ək/	“difficult”
53.	/pə-k ^h ət/	“one”
54.	/t ^h i-sən/	“blood”

3. Trisyllabic - It contains three syllables in a word.

	Hmar	Gloss
55.	/kut-te-ku/	“index finger”
56.	/som-pə-hni/	“twelve”
57.	/som-pə-k ^h ət/	“eleven”

4. Quadrisyllabic - Quadrisyllabic makes the word as four syllables.

Hmar	Gloss
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58.	/sə-kəi-bək-nəi/	“lion”
59.	/som-li-pə-k ^h ət/	“forty one”
60.	/in-hum-him-na/	“shelter (N.)”

5. Pentasyllabic - Pentasyllabic is a word containing five syllables. It is less in number to compare with others.

	Hmar	Gloss
61.	/in-hmel-hrit-tir-na/	“introduction”
62.	/som-ruk-pə-sə-ri/	“sixty seven”
63.	/som-sə-ri-pə-k ^h ət/	“seventy one”

Conclusion

In conclusion, syllable can be analyzed into *segments of syllable*, *structure of syllable*, *syllabic pattern*, *structural restrictions of syllable* and *syllabifications*. Segment can be divided into three types as onset, peak and coda. The structures of syllable can be discussed as open and closed. In syllabic pattern, vowel (V), vowel consonant (VC), vowel consonant vowel (VCV), consonant vowel (CV), consonant vowel consonant (CVC), consonant consonant vowel (CCV) and consonant consonant vowel consonant (CCVC) are analyzed. Structural restriction of syllable deals with both onset and coda restrictions, onset restriction and coda restriction. And syllabification describes about the monosyllabic, disyllabic, trisyllabic, quadrisyllabic and pentasyllabic.

Abbreviations

ELD.	:	“elder/senior”
V	:	“vowel”
C	:	“consonant”
3PP.	:	“third person pronominal marker”
N	:	“noun”

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- : “syllabic boundary”

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