The Vowels of Sadu Koireng

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the vowel system of Sadu Koireng language. We will examine vowels and diphthongs of this language. The vowel system consists of six vowels phonemes and four diphthongs.

Keywords: Phonemes, vowels, diphthongs, minimal pairs

Introduction

Sadu Koireng people migrated to Manipur from Eastern Burma (Kabui, 1987). The focus of this study is on Sadu Koireng. This language is spoken at Saikul Sub-division (30 km away from Imphal) under Senapati District of Manipur. It is one of the little known Tibeto-Burman Languages of Manipur. There are 35 houses in this village and the population is about 330. In order to document this language, it is a small step forward to take up the study of this language. In this paper, description of vowel phonemes of Sadu Koireng is discussed. An inventory of vowel phonemes is discussed on the basis of minimal pairs. There are six vowel phonemes and four diphthongs found in this language.

Vowels

There are six vowel phonemes (Yashawanta Singh, 2003). They are /i, e, ə, a, u, o/. There are front, central and back in terms of their place of articulation. And according to their

manner of articulation, they may be classified into high, mid and low, they are shown in the table 1 below.

	Front		Central		Back	
	Rounded	Unrounded	Rounded	Unrounded	Rounded	Unrounded
HIGH		i			u	
MID		e		ə	o	
LOW				a		

Table No. 1. Vowel phonemes of Sadu koireng

The articulatory description of these six vowel phonemes are given below:

i - High, front unrounded vowel

e - Mid, front unrounded vowel

ə - Mid, central unrounded vowel

a - low, central unrounded vowel

u - High,back rounded vowel

o - Mid, back rounded vowel

Phonemic Status of Vowels

The phonemic status of these vowels can be established on the basis of the minimal pairs shown in the following.

/i/:/e/ in 'house'

en 'look'

tiŋ	'back'	
teŋ	'towards'	
ət^hiŋ	'swelling'	
ət^heŋ	'holly'	
sim	'evening'	
sem	'blow'	
mi	'man'	
me	'meat'	
əci	'fear'	
əce	'go'	
miru	'thief'	
meru	'meat bone'	

/ə/:/a/	əreŋ	'king'
	əraŋ	'angry'
	rəm	'land'
	ram	'tribe'
	ətək	'sorrow'
	ətak	'migrate'

/o/:/u/	om	'live'
	Um	'gourd'
	p^hoŋ	'publish'
	p^huŋ	'clan'

	əloŋ	'open'
	əluŋ	'heart'
	won	'belly'
	wun	'skin'
	jo	'sheep'
	jun	'urine'
	mot	'stick'
	mul	'body hair'

/a/:/u/	ai	'turmeric'
	ui	'dog'
	ban	'arm'
	bun	'pourdown'
	ral	'war'
	rul	'snake'
	la	'song'
	lu	'head'
	laŋ	'weed'
	luŋ	'rock'

/e/:/a/	ce	'paper'
	ca	'tea'

/o/:/a/	ətak	'boil'

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	ətok	'attend'
	wan	'sky'
	won	'belly'
	lam	'dance'
	lom	'clove'
	kʰaŋ	'pan'
	kʰoŋ	'drum'

/i/:/o/	ciŋ	'hill'
	coŋ	'language'
	mit	'eye'
	mot	'banana'
	əsiŋ	'mouth'
	əsoŋ	'cook'
	tir	'order'
	tor	'hip'

/e/:/o/	wen	'today'
	won	'belly'
	sem	'blow'
	som	'ten'
	rep	'rape'
	rope	'chest'
	kʰeŋ	'dish'

kʰoŋ	'drum'
cek	'brick'
cok	'chalk'

Occurrence of Vowels

All the six vowels can occur in all the positions of the word- initial, medial and final positions. However, the phonemes /e/ and /o/ occur rarely in the initial positions, but all the vowels occur most frequently in the medial position. Their illustrations are given below.

Initial Occurrence of All the Vowels

/i/	i	'yes'
	in	'house'
	inkir	'wall lizard'
	incuŋ	'roof'
	inkil	'fireplace'
	inkʰar	'door'

/e/	el	'thigh'
	en	'look'

/ə/	əsin	'small'
	əsen	'red'
	əreŋ	'poor'

/a/   arsi   'star'

        arpi   'hen'

        arkʰoŋ 'cock'

/u/   uy   'dog'

        utoŋ   'rolliŋ pan'

        ut   'camel'

        uiloknə'zar'

/o/   om   'live'

        oŋ   'sit'

        oca   'teacher'

Medial Occurrence of All the Vowels

/i/   əhip   'ice'

        mit   'eye'

        mico   'blind'

        mici   'salt'

        əjiŋ   'darkness'

/e/   reŋ   'kiŋ'

        ətʰeŋ   'holly'

        əreŋ   'poor'

/ə/	səpi	'cow'
	rəm	'land'
	səkʰi	'deer'

/a/	ban	'arm'
	laŋ	'weed'
	caŋ	'grain'
	ral	'war'

/u/	luŋ	'rock'
	rul	'snake'
	kut	'hand'

/o/	pon	'cloth'
	mot	'banana'
	artok	'duck'

Final Occurrence of All the Vowels

/i/	mi	'man'
	ni	'sun'
	tʰi	'blood'
	arsi	'star'

/e/	le	'and'

	me	'meat'
	ke	'leg'
	be	'pulse'

/ə/	uiloknə	'jar'
	səŋtainə	'treaty'
	səciktən-nə	'fodder cutter'

/a/	ha	'tooth'
	wa	'birth'
	tʰa	'moon'
	əna	'ill'
	mersa	'beg'

/u/	lu	'head'
	mu	'see'
	əru	'seed'
	miru	'thief'

/o/	ənikʰo	'day'
	lilo	'joint'
	raltʰo	'attack'
	po	'buttock'

Phonetic features of six vowels of this language are given in the table 2 below.

	i	e	ə	a	U	o
Syllabic	+	+	+	+	+	+
Sonorant	+	+	+	+	+	+
Consonantal	-	-	-	-	-	-
Round	-	-	-	-	+	+
High	+	+	-	-	+	-
Back	-	-	-	-	+	+

Table No. 2 : Phonetic features of six vowels of Sadu Koireng

Diphthong

The six pure vowels described in the preceding section are articulated without changing the organs of speech from the beginning to the end of the sounds that is, during the uttering of each of pure vowels the organs of the speech remain stationary. A diphthong, however, starts in one vowel position and glides towards another vowel position within one and the some breadth impulse.

In Sadu Koireng there are four diphthongs. They are /əi/, /ai/, /oi/ and /ui/. An inventory of diphthongs in Sadu Koireng is given in the following table 3.

<u>Front</u>   <u>Central</u>   <u>Back</u>

Table 3. Diphthong Chart

The starting point of Sadu Koireng diphthong is marked with a dot (.) and the direction in which the tongue moves is marked with an arrow.

These diphthongs can be established by minimal pairs.

Examples:

1) /əi/:/ai/

        mai   'fire'   mai   'pumpkin'

        əi   'tongue'   lai   'navel'

        ərəi   'dry'   ərai   'pregnant'

2) /ai/ : /oi/

        kʰai   'grass hopper' kʰoi   'who'

        maipak 'success'   moipa 'groom'

        silai   'gun'   səloi 'buffallo'

3) /ui/ : /ai/

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ui   'dog'   ai   'tumeric'

suip   'binder'   saipi   'elephant'

Distribution of Diphthongs

The diphthongs /əi/, /ai/, /oi/ and /ui/ can occur initially, medially and finally. There is a variation in the frequency of their occurrences. Only /ai/ and /ui/ can occur only in the initial positions.

1. /əi/ A diphthong begins with ə and ends with i.

   Examples:

   nəipil   'mud'

   nəitʰoicuŋ   'earth'

   məi   'fire'

2. /ai/ A diphthong begins with a and ends with i.

   Examples:

   ai   'turmeric'

   phailəi   'mainland'

   silailəi   'gun powder'

   kʰai   'grasshopper'

3. /oi/ A diphthong begins with o and ends with i.

   Examples:

   moipa   'groom'

   əpkʰoinə   'crusher'

   luŋhoi   'happiness'

4. /ui/ A diphthong begins eith u and ends with i.

Examples:

ui   'dog'

tuitein   'flood'

rui   'rope'

The distribution of all the diphthongs are given in the following table 4.

Diphthongs	Initial	Medial	Final
əi	---	-əi-	-əi
Ai	ai -	-ai-	-ai
Oi	---	-oi-	-oi
Ui	ui -	-ui-	-ui

Table 4: Distribution of diphthongs

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to discuss vowels of Sadu Koireng language. There are six vowel phonemes and four diphthongs. The vowel phonemes are /i,e,ə,a,o and u/ and their occurrences have also been discussed. In addition to this inventory of six vowel phonemes there are also four diphthongs namely, /əi/, /ai/, /oi/ and /ui/.

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