

PHONOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF HAJONG

The present research work entitled ‘**Phonological Analysis of Hajong**’ is an effort to analyze the phonological features of Hajong language. It analyzes the phonological features of Hajong in a systematic manner.

The work comprises of four chapters excluding bibliography and appendices. The chapters are Introduction, Review of Literature, Phonology, and Conclusion.

The **Chapter I - Introduction** introduces the Hajong people and their language along with some aspects of their life such as socio-economic and cultural since all these are concerned with language in one or the other way. Although our concern is mainly on Hajong spoken in Assam, the introductory knowledge about the Hajong language may be helpful since it is widely used not only in Assam and some other states in India but also in Bangladesh. Keeping this in view, it includes the following objectives: (1) to introduce the Hajong language. (2) to introduce the speakers of Hajong. (3) to introduce the linguistic affinity of the Hajong language. (4) to furnish historical background of its speakers. (5) to give a general geographical attachments of the Hajong people. (6) to furnish a general statistical data of the Hajong population. (7) to present a brief information about the culture, economic and socio-political life of the Hajong people of Assam.

Hajong is the name of a language used by the Hajong, an ethnic tribe. As per information from Wikipedia Encyclopedia (retrieved on 06 March 2015, 08:38 p.m.),

Hajong is spoken by more than 175,000 all over the world. The number of Hajong speakers is approximately 100,000 in the north eastern state of Assam.

The Hajong language belongs to the Indo Aryan (IA) family of language. **Grierson classifies Hajong as an** Indo Aryan (IA) language and considers it as a sub-dialect of Bengali. In this regard, his remarks may be worth mentionable as he writes, “This is corrupt form of Eastern Bengali spoken by the members of the Haijong (often incorrectly called Hajong) tribe, a Tibeto-Burman clan settled in the districts of Mymensing and Sylhet, principally in the country at the foot of the Garo Hills. Haijong (or Hajong) has hitherto been described as a Tibeto- Burman language, but the tribe has long abandoned its original form of speech” (LSI, vol.5 pt-1).

As per the Ethnologue, Hajong is classified as Indo-European > Indo- Iranian > Indo-Aryan > Eastern zone > Bengali- Assamese (Gordon 2005, *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*. 15th Edn. Dallas, SIL International. Online version: <http://www.ethnologue.com/> (retrieved on 06 March 2015, 08:38 p.m.).

Our study reveals that Hajong spoken in the present day has affinity with both Assamese and Bengali, e.g. Haj. /mas/ As. /ma:s/ Beng. /ma:s/ ‘fish’. Again, there are many words which are a little or totally different from these languages, e.g. Haj./kuwlu/ As./dawaria/ Beng./meg^hla/ ‘cloudy’.

According to geographical location of the Hajong people, it is noticed that their language has five dialects such as- (1) Dahkahania, (2) Koraibaria (Char Ana), (3) Susongi, (4) Barohajari (Kalu-Malu Para) and (5) Mechparia. However, some have divided the regions into eight, the three others apart from the above are- Koraibaria (Baro

Ana), Lahar and Bangsikunda (Hajong, P.C.: 2002). However, as per our survey, in Assam only two regional varieties i.e. Dahkahania and Susongi are available with a few speakers of Koroibaria also.

Regarding racial affinity of Hajong people, it is seen that they belong to the mongoloid race. A brief historical overview, geographical location, origin of the word 'Hajong', Hajong population, background of the Study, brief methodology, demographic characteristics, culture, economy, literacy & education, socio-political status of the Hajong, outline of the thesis, and contribution of the study are some other points discussed in this chapter.

Chapter 2- Review of Literature includes some books, articles and project report for a review of what have been written by the concerned writers. The number of works on the Hajong language is very few. The available literature concerning Hajong are scattered since no intensive study has been done so far till date. Our survey reveals that whatever researches done so far are available in three languages- English, Assamese and Hajong. Further, most of the works are about the tradition and culture of the Hajong people where a little reference to their language is also available. Only a few studies have been done so far on particular aspects of the language such as grammar, phonological features and sociolinguistic survey etc. So, in this chapter, an attempt has been made to introduce the literature concerning Hajong and to review those works. The literature may be divided into two sections- **Fundamental Research Works** that relates mainly language and **Related Research Works** which are mainly concerning the literature, culture etc. of the Hajongs but having some reference to their language too.

Chapter3- Phonology establishes the phonemes of Hajong. The phonemes are established on the basis of minimal and sub minimal pairs as presented in this chapter. Description of the phonemes along with their various positions in words is also presented. Then, consonant combinations- cluster, sequence and geminates are found out and presented with chart and examples. Again, syllable pattern of the language is investigated and analysed with examples. Next, the changes happened to vocabulary and pronunciation of Hajong have been found out which is discussed with examples in the Morphophonemics section.

Chapter-4 Conclusion: This chapter contains the summary of our findings. Chapter-1 has found out the general introduction of the Hajong tribe in general and of Assam in particular. It also proves the fact that since a large number of speakers are available, so their language should get importance from linguistic point of view and research may be conducted in various aspects of it to understand the language well. Such research may contribute to the development of the language.

Chapter -2 has revealed the present status of the language with the analysis of the concerned works already done. It also has established the fact that more research works are required to be done on this language. However, it has come to our notice that some data regarding the language provided by some writers contains error that intensifies the need for further research. Again, we have found out the rich culture and tradition of the Hajong tribe through the review of the related literature.

Chapter-3 has established six (6) *Vowel* phonemes / i, u, e, o and a /, eleven (11) *Diphthongs*, / ai, ao, oi, ui, uu, ei, eu, ia, iu, ui, uu / and twenty-five (25) *Consonant* phonemes, / p, b, t, d, k, g, p^h, b^h, t^h, d^h, k^h, g^h, m, n, ŋ, ʃ, s, z, z^h, h, l, r, w, y/ in Hajong. The existence of tone is not found.

Consonant combinations show the existence of cluster, sequence, and geminates. Two consonant clusters are found in three positions- initial, medial and final. Initial consonant clusters are not found in an abundant number in Hajong language. In the initial consonant clusters, the first member can be /p, b, t, k, g, s,/ while other consonants viz. liquids /l, r/, and stop /t/ occupy the position as the second member of the clusters. The occurrences of medial consonant clusters are very few. In these consonant clusters, the first member can be / b, t, d, k^h, g, s,/ while other consonants viz. liquids /l, r/ occupy the position as the second member of the cluster. A small number of two consonant clusters occur in the final position of a word in Hajong. Most of the consonants which occur in the final cluster do not occur in the word initial position. Interestingly, most of the words, where the final clusters occur are the loan word from English. At the same time, it is also seen that the final cluster is found only in the speech of educated persons whereas there is a case of final consonant cluster deletion when the same words are used by the uneducated native speakers. In the final two consonant clusters, the possible combinations are as the following. The first member can be nasal /n/, fricative /s/, and liquid /l/ while the second members include stop /t/, /d/, nasal /m/, and fricative /s/.

Consonant sequences are found up to three consonants. The possible combinations in case of two consonant sequences are as follows (the first member can be

the consonants outside bracket with which the combination of those within bracket is possible as second member):

- (i) p + (t, g^h, z, s, l, r)
- (ii) p^h + (n)
- (iii) b + (d, l, r)
- (iv) t+ (p, p^h, b, b^h, k, k^h, g^h, s, m, n, l, r)
- (v) t^h+ (l)
- (vi) d+ (b, g, n, l, r)
- (vii) d^h+ (k)
- (viii) k+ (p, b, t, t^h, d, d^h, g^h, z, s, n, l, r)
- (ix) k^h+ (l, r)
- (x) g+ (d, n, l, r)
- (xi) g^h+ (n)
- (xii) z+ (n, l)
- (xiii) s+ (p, p^h, t, k, k^h, g, m, n, l, r)
- (xiv) m+ (p, b, d^h, k, k^h, s, n, l, r)
- (xv) n+ (b, t, t^h, d, d^h, č, z, s, l, r)

(xvi) η^+ (p, p^h, t, t^h, k, k^h, g, z, s, h, l, r)

(xvii) l^+ (p, p^h, b, b^h, t, t^h, d, k, k^h, g, č, z, z^h, s, m, n)

(xviii) r^+ (p, p^h, b, b^h, t, d, k, k^h, g, z, s, m, n).

Three consonant sequences are only a few the combinations of which are as follows (the first member can be the consonants outside bracket with which the combination of those within bracket is possible as second and third members):

(i) n^+ (tr, dr)

(ii) η^+ (kl, k^hr)

(iii) r^+ (pr)

As per our investigation, the following stop, affricate and laterals form geminates in medial positions in Hajong: /-p+p-/ , /-d+d-/ , /-t+t-/ , /-k+k-/ , /-m+m-/ , /-n+n-/ , /l+l/.

Regarding the numbers of syllables that may occur in a word, evidence of up to five syllables have been found. However, the occurrence of pentasyllabic words is very limited. Study reveals that Hajong has five patterns of syllables: V, VC, CV, CVV, and CVC.

Here, we have discussed the processes concerning changes in the words of this language. It is noticed that that the processes responsible for change in the vocabulary or pronunciation includes both phonologically and morphologically conditioned changes. It

has also been found that prothesis, apocope, syncope, diphthongization, de aspiration-devoicing, and devoicing are some of the processes responsible for such changes.

Apart from the above, the research work has found out some other features of the Hajong language. It is observed that like other languages, the influence of foreign words is available in it. Therefore, a large number of words have been found as loan words which originated due to the influence of different foreign words. Some loan words of Hajong are enlisted in chapter-4 in support of the above statement.

Not only the influence of foreign words are visible, but also the use of surrounding Indo-Aryan languages like Assamese and Bangla is also found in a large scale. Some examples of these words are presented in chapter-4.

The study also reveals that alternative use of sounds both vowel and consonant in a particular word is a feature of spoken Hajong. Like the vowel sound as mentioned earlier, such use is found in the pronunciation of consonant sound also. For example, /s/ and /h/ are found to be alternatively used by the speakers of different regions. We have observed that the speakers of ‘susong’ dialect use the former while those speakers belong to ‘dashkahani’ dialect use the latter for the same word e.g. /sak/ > /hak/ ‘leafy vegetable.

We have found out another remarkable characteristic of the Hajong language that is the use of vowel phoneme /ɯ/ (close back un-rounded vowel) and which is very frequently used by the speakers, is not available in other IA languages, but a ‘typical’ sound of the TB languages. Further, the most interesting fact is that the use of /ɯ/ is so frequent in Hajong but no other Indo-Aryan (IA) languages even Assamese and Bengali

with which it is familiar in some way, use this sound. This leads to assume that probably this vowel sound is the property of the original Hajong language that is extinct now but the sound remains prevalent as spontaneous inheritance through generations.

As per the data presented above, it can be said that though the Hajong language is influenced by the surrounding languages like Assamese and Bengali concerning vocabulary, there are differences in respect pronunciation and other linguistic features amongst these. Moreover, a large number of words are found totally different which are independent of both meaning and pronunciation. Hence, Hajong may be considered as an independent language and not a dialect of any other language.

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