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Syllable in Mao

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Abstract

The speakers of Mao language is known as Mao. Mao villages are located in Senapati district of Manipur. The Language of the Mao is one of the Naga-Kuki groups of Tibeto-Burman language family.

The present paper studies the syllabic structure of Mao language. The syllable has an important role in phonology as a constituent that represents significant groups of segments. In this language, there are three (3) types of syllables, i.e., monosyllabic, disyllabic and polysyllabic. The monosyllabic words are limited in number. But disyllabic and polysyllabic words are abundantly found. For example, kosa ‘cat’, piku ‘comb’, koso ‘wing’, kolak^he ‘fox’

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 14:1 January 2014

Elangbam Manimohon Meitei, Ph.D. Student
Syllable in Mao

seməki ‘malaria’ and utəkatəməi ‘cultivators’, etc. Generally open syllables are maximum in number than the closed syllable.

Key words: monosyllabic, disyllabic, polysyllabic, open syllable and closed syllable.

Introduction

Mao is a small tribe inhabiting in the Senapati district, the northern part of Manipur. It is 62 miles far away from Imphal by road on the National Highway 39. It is one of the oldest hill stations of Manipur and its area is blessed with a rich flora and fauna. Maos live a simple life very close to nature and are also agrarian.

The speakers of Mao language are known as Mao. They belong to the Mongoloid racial group. The language they speak is one of the Naga-Kuki groups of the Tibeto-Burman language family. A few scholars like G. A. Grierson (1903) included Mao in the Naga-Kuki Group of the Tibeto Burman language family. Benedict PK (1972) described that Mao belongs to the Naga group of Sino-Tibetan language family. And Robert Shafer (1974) also describes Mao a language of the Luhupa unit in the eastern branch under Old Kukish Section of Burmic Division of the Sino-Tibetan. According to Scot Delancy (1987), Mao belongs to the Naga Group under the Assam Burmese section of the Tibeto-Burman Language family.

Syllable

A syllable is a phonological unit composed of one or more phonemes. It has a central role in phonological theory as a constituent that represents phonological significant groupings of segments.

“The syllable may be defined as a minimal pattern of phoneme combination with a vowel as nucleus, preceded and followed by a consonant unit or permitted consonant combination” (O’ Connor and Trim 1953).

The syllable (ə) is divided into constituents: onset (o) and rhyme (r), of which the latter is further divided into nucleus (n) and coda (c). It is shown as below:

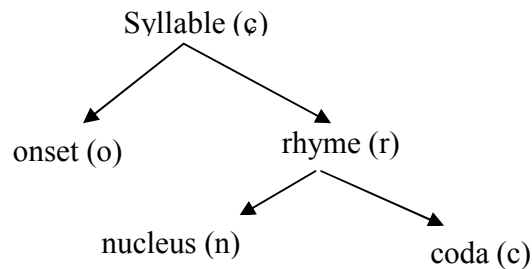


Fig. Syllable chart

Every syllable has a nucleus, which is usually a vowel. Nucleus is the prominent part of a syllable. The nucleus may be preceded by one or more consonant segments called onset, and followed by one or more consonant segments called coda. In a syllable that has no onset, no coda, the nucleus can stand alone.

Syllable Type in Mao

According to the structure of syllable, there are two kinds of syllables in Mao language, namely, open and closed syllables. Open syllable are those syllable which end in a vowel.

Examples

Mao	Gloss
/ni/	‘you’
/ci/	‘house’
/mo/	‘no/not’
/ŋa/	‘lakh’
/t ^h u/	‘one thousand’
/ji/	‘crore’
/usi/	‘dog’
/uto/	‘cow’

/umi/	‘fire’
/ume/	‘mouth’
/osa/	‘cloth’
/umo/	‘pumpkin’

On the other hand, closed syllables are those syllables which end with a consonant. But in this language, closed syllables in disyllabic words are found very limited. However, it is also not found in monosyllabic words in which all the sounds are vowels.

Closed syllable types of word are found in disyllabic words only.

Examples

Mao	Gloss
/saɣər/	‘mole’
/uŋ huŋ/	‘nose’
/kasər/	‘alive’
/heŋɣər/	‘tear’
/pik ^h or/	‘pillow’
/mikir/	‘Imphal’

Syllabic Structure in Mao Language

In Mao language, monosyllabic, disyllabic and polysyllabic types of syllabic structures are found. Monosyllabic is a single sound unit which contains the minimum nucleus only. There are 3 (three) monosyllabic structures in this language. They are divided on the basis of the vowel (V) and consonant (C).

The three types of monosyllabic words are as follows:

- i. V - /e/ ‘yes’

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 14:1 January 2014

Elangbam Manimohon Meitei, Ph.D. Student
Syllable in Mao

	VV	-	/əi/	‘I’
ii.	CV	-	/ci/	‘house’
		-	/ni/	‘you’
		-	/mo/	‘no/not’
iii.	CCV	-	/kri/	‘hundred’
		-	/pfi/	‘pregnant’

Disyllabic means two syllables in a word. In Mao language disyllabic types of syllable are found abundantly.

Examples

Mao	Gloss
/ovo/	‘pig’
/ovu/	Star
/uba/	‘hand’
/uhu/	‘teeth’
/ume/	‘mouth’
/pike/	‘ant’
/kupi/	‘duck’
/kosa/	‘cat’
/koso/	‘wing’
/bet ^h o/	‘arm’
/ok ^h o/	‘fish’
/piku/	‘comb’

Polysyllabic means two or more syllables in a word. Examples from Mao language are given below:

Mao	Gloss
/muk ^h orə/	‘cough’
/seməki/	‘malaria’

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 14:1 January 2014
 Elangbam Manimohon Meitei, Ph.D. Student
 Syllable in Mao

/inobet ^h o/	‘left arm’
/kolak ^h e/	‘fox’
/kosomæi/	‘ill’
/cat ^h erə/	‘asthma’
/upikoso/	‘headache’
/somaro/	‘garlic’
/utokəsona/	‘food’
/utəkatəmæi/	‘cultivator’

Conclusion

Syllable is a unit of pronunciation. It is a constituent that represents phonologically significant groupings of segments. It also helps with the phonetic properties of gestural magnitude, overlap and variability in speech production and speech errors. In Mao language, syllable also plays an important role in identifying the distinct syllable constituents corresponding to distinct mode. Monosyllabic words are found in limited numbers. But disyllabic and polysyllabic words are abundantly found. The maximum numbers of words end with a vowel sound.

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Elangbam Manimohon Meitei, Ph.D. Student
Syllable in Mao

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