

# Sound System of Khoibu

Laishram Bijenkumar Singh, Ph.D. Research Scholar

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## 1.0. Introduction

Khoibu is a language that belongs to the Kuki Chin Naga group of Tibeto-Burman family (Grierson, Linguistic Survey of India, Vol. III Part II, 1903). It is an undocumented and highly endangered Tibeto-Burman language being spoken by Khoibu tribe of Manipur. The literal meaning of this tribe is derived from *khoi* and *pu*, where *khoi* means bee and *pu* means owner. Thus the term refers to the speakers of this language as the ones who own bees, beehives and honey in the indigenous land of Khoibu territory. It is spoken by around 2800 speakers in Chandel district of Manipur. There are eight Khoibu villages in Manipur, viz., Khoibu Khullen, Biyang, Yamolching, Nungourok, Khamsing, Salemram, Thallem and Thawai.

The following analysis is based on a lexicon containing around 500 words which I elicited from Mosyel Syelsaangthyel Khaling (50 years), a native speaker of Khoibu from Khamsing village and some additional data from Donyaisen Hongsha (37 years), a native speaker of Khoibu from Khoibu Khullen.

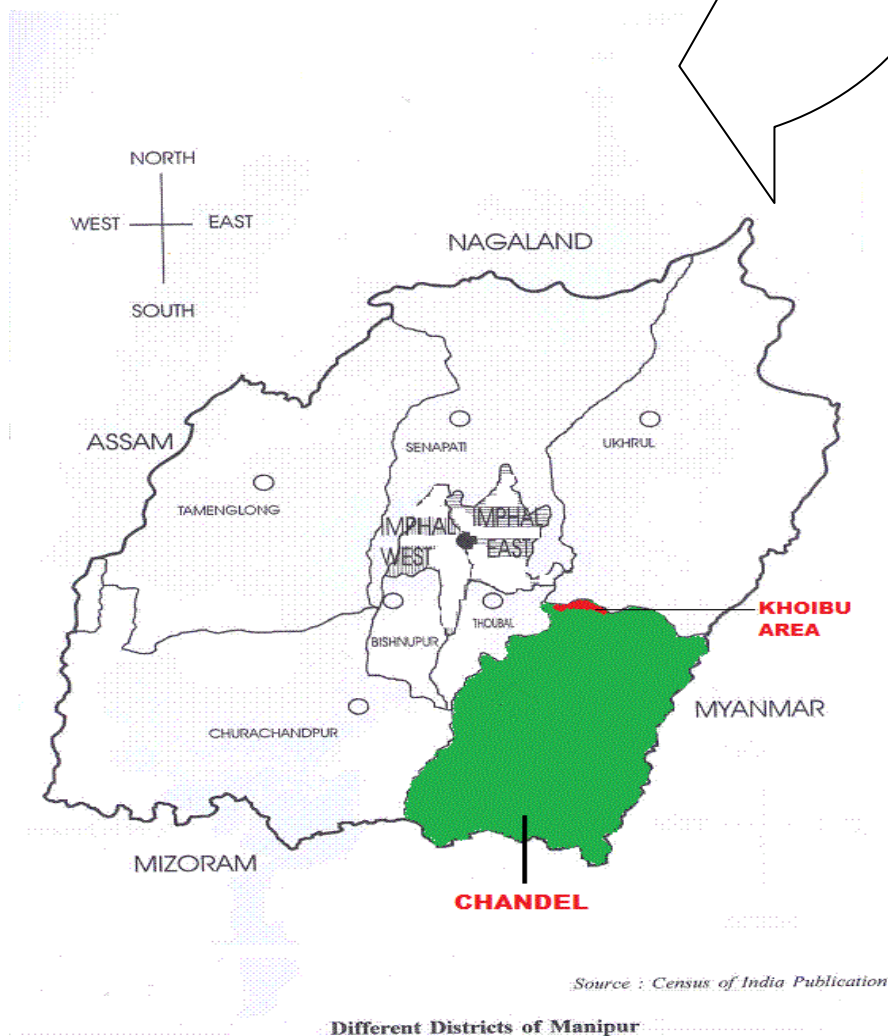
In the first section I provide an inventory of vowel phonemes along with their distribution. This is followed by consonants and allophones along with their distribution. In the second section, consonant cluster formation and syllabic structure of the language are illustrated with appropriate examples.

Tone is a very prominent feature in Tibeto-Burman. Khoibu has three distinct tones.

## Manipur Map showing CHANDEL district



## India Map showing Manipur



## 1.2. Inventory of Phonemes

There are 24 phonemes in Khoibu, out of which 18 are consonants and 6 are vowels. In Table 1 consonants are presented in a table form illustrating the manner and place of articulation. In Table 2 vowels are shown.

## 1.3. Consonants

There are 18 consonant phonemes in Khoibu. Out of these phonemes nine are stops, two fricatives, three nasals, one lateral, one trill and two semivowels. All the 18 consonant phonemes can occur in the initial and medial position of the syllables and in the final position only nine consonant phoneme /p, t, k, l, r, m, n, ŋ/ can occur.

		Bilabial		Alveolar		Palatal		Velar		Glottal	
		vl	vd	vl	vd	vl	vd	vl	vd	vl	vd
Stops	Unasp.	p	b	t	d	č		k			
	Asp.	p <sup>h</sup>		t <sup>h</sup>				k <sup>h</sup>			
Fricatives				s						h	
Nasals			m		n				ŋ		
Lateral					l						
Trill					r						
Semi-Vowels			w				y				

Table 1 Chart of Consonant Phonemes

### 1.3.1 Distribution of the Consonant Phonemes

The consonant phonemes of Khoibu can occur in the initial, medial and final positions. In the following section, distribution of phonemes is presented. The voiceless, unaspirated, bilabial, stop /p/ can occur in the initial, medial and final positions.

	Initial		Medial		Final	
/p/	/pa/	‘father’	/əpi/	‘mature bamboo’	/dop/	‘brain’
/b/	/ba/	‘some’	/əban/	‘branch’		
/t/	/təŋla/	‘moon’	/məti/	‘seed’	/mit/	‘eye’
/d/	/di/	‘stool’	/əda/	‘rotten egg’		

/k/	/kəpən/ ‘forehead’	/kəkem/ ‘withers’	/čak/ ‘food’
/č/	/čan/ ‘life’	/əčĩ/ ‘corner’	
/p <sup>h</sup> /	/p <sup>h</sup> u/ ‘pot’	/əp <sup>h</sup> on/ ‘pebble’	
/t <sup>h</sup> /	/t <sup>h</sup> or/ ‘ice’	/tət <sup>h</sup> əŋ/ ‘wall’	
/k <sup>h</sup> /	/k <sup>h</sup> əmən/ ‘old things’	/taŋk <sup>h</sup> up/ ‘verandah’	
/s/	/səm/ ‘hair’	/əsə/ ‘wing’	
/h/	/həl/ ‘cow’	/kəhən/ ‘to weed’	
/m/	/mə/ ‘guest’	/kəmi/ ‘dark’	/səm/ ‘hair’
/n/	/nə/ ‘lip’	/kənen/ ‘soft’	/kəpən/ ‘forehead’
/ŋ/	/ŋət <sup>h</sup> iŋ/ ‘fermented fish’	/nəŋak/ ‘girl’	/daŋ/ ‘balcony’
/l/	/la/ ‘song’	/kəlo/ ‘wealthy’	/əpal/ ‘royalty’
/r/	/ra/ ‘wild yam’	/ərəŋ/ ‘side’	/čər/ ‘sister’
/y/	/ya/ ‘animal’	/əyou/ ‘as usual’	
/w/	/wa/ ‘chicken’	/kəwar/ ‘light’	

### 1.3.2 Allophonic Variation in Khoibu

The voiceless unaspirated stops and nasals show allophonic variations, i.e., they are released in initial positions and unreleased in final positions.

/p/	[p]	/par/	‘flower’
	[p̚]	/əčop/	‘lungs’
/t/	[t]	/təsai/	‘rice’
	[t̚]	/mit/	‘eye’
/k/	[k]	/kəŋou/	‘white’
	[k̚]	/p <sup>h</sup> ək/	‘mat’
/m/	[m]	/məliŋ/	‘ant’
	[m̚]	/k <sup>h</sup> um/	‘umbrella’
/n/	[n]	/nəŋak/	‘girl’
	[n̚]	/yon/	‘village’
/ŋ/	[ŋ]	/ŋəson/	‘fish’
	[ŋ̚]	/wáŋ/	‘leg’

/l/	[l]	/lu/	‘head’
	[lʰ]	/kədol/	‘slippery’
/r/	[r]	/rəm/	‘land’
	[rʰ]	/dar/	‘shoulder’

#### 1.4. Vowel

	Front	Central	Back
High	i		u
Mid	e	ə	o
Low		a	

Table 2 Chart of Vowel Phonemes

Out of the six vowels, there are two front vowels: the high front unrounded vowel /i/ and mid front unrounded vowel /e/. The two back vowels are high back rounded vowel /u/ and mid back rounded vowel /o/. The two central vowels are mid central unrounded vowel /ə/ and low central unrounded vowel /a/.

##### 1.4.1. Occurrences of the Vowels

All the vowel phonemes of Khoibu can occur in all the positions except /e/. /e/ cannot occur in the word or syllable initial positions. In an open monosyllabic word, most of the vowels are long in the final positions.

	Initial	Medial	Final
/i/	/i/ ‘they’	/čim/ ‘house’	/məti/ ‘salt’
/e/		/t <sup>h</sup> el/ ‘resting place’	/be/ ‘beans’
/a/	/a/ ‘he’	/ban/ ‘yam’	/pa/ ‘father’
/ə/	/ən/ ‘curry’	/həl/ ‘cow’	/həttə/ ‘this’
/o/	/ol/ ‘throat’	/t <sup>h</sup> or/ ‘ice’	/p <sup>h</sup> o/ ‘shield’

/u/	/ui/	‘dog’	/tuŋ/	‘3 <sup>rd</sup> daughter’	/p <sup>h</sup> u/	‘pot’
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### 1.5. Consonant Clusters

The cluster formations in Khoibu are very limited like other languages of the family. The analysis reveals that there are two types of cluster formation in the language: initial and medial cluster formation. Initial cluster are formed by combining /t/ or /t<sup>h</sup>/ with /l/ or /r/. Generally initial cluster in Khoibu are formed by combining voiceless alveolar unaspirated stop /t/ or voiceless alveolar aspirated stop /t<sup>h</sup>/ with lateral /l/ or trill /r/. Similarly, medial clusters are formed by combining /t/ or /t<sup>h</sup>/ with /l/ or /r/.

#### Initial Cluster (stops+ l /r)

t+l	>	tl	>	/tlou/	‘language’
				/tlaŋləm/	‘highway’
t+r	>	tr		/tran/	‘mosquito’
				/trim/	‘needle’
t <sup>h</sup> +l	>	thl	>	/t <sup>h</sup> leŋ/	‘forever’
				/t <sup>h</sup> loŋ/	‘bridge’
t <sup>h</sup> +r	>	thr		/t <sup>h</sup> rom/	‘unity’
				/t <sup>h</sup> ral/	‘summer’

#### Medial Cluster (stops+l/r)

t+l	>	-tl-	>	/kətlou/	‘rebuke’
				/kətla/	‘far’
t+r	>	-tr-	>	/keitra/	‘my brother (female)’
				/kətri/	‘to fly’
t <sup>h</sup> +l	>	-thl-	>	/ət <sup>h</sup> laŋ/	‘half’
				/kət <sup>h</sup> laŋ/	‘broken’

t <sup>h</sup> +r	>	-thr-	>	/hət <sup>h</sup> ru/	‘pigeon’
				/kət <sup>h</sup> ri/	‘dismantle’

## 1.6. Syllables

In Khoibu, a syllable may contain only a vowel, consonant and vowel, and consonant, vowel and consonant sequences. Khoibu has two types of syllables. They are close syllable and open syllable.

### 1.6.1. Open Syllable

All vowels can occur in the final position of an open monosyllabic word except the vowel phoneme /ə/.

Onset	Rhyme	
C	V	
h	i	‘blood’
b	e	‘beans’
p	a	‘father’
p <sup>h</sup>	o	‘shield’
p <sup>h</sup>	u	‘pot’

Similarly, all consonant phonemes can occur in the onset position of the open syllable.

p	a	‘father’
p <sup>h</sup>	u	‘pot’
b	a	‘some’
t	e	‘eldest daughter’
t <sup>h</sup>	a	‘few’
d	i	‘stool’
k	o	‘second son’
k <sup>h</sup>	e	‘a kind of tree’
s	a	‘wing’
h	a	‘tooth’
č	a	‘paddy’

m	e	‘5 <sup>th</sup> son’
n	a	‘nose’
ŋ	i	‘we’
l	a	‘song’
r	o	‘bamboo’
w	a	‘axe’
y	a	‘animal’

### 1.6.2. Close Syllable

All voiceless unaspirated stops and nasal consonants can occur in the syllable final position.

Onset	Rhyme	Coda	
d	o	p	‘brain’
m	i	t	‘eye’
p <sup>h</sup>	ə	k	‘mat’
č	i	m	‘house’
b	o	n	‘guard jar’
r	o	ŋ	‘body’
d	a	r	‘shoulder’
h	ə	l	‘cow’

Except for the velar nasal /ŋ/ and palatal semi vowel /y/, all the consonant phonemes occur in the syllable initial position of close syllable.

Onset	Rhyme	Coda	
p	a	r	‘flower’
p <sup>h</sup>	a	l	‘name’
b	u	ŋ	‘hill’
t	e	p	‘drop’
t <sup>h</sup>	o	r	‘ice’
d	a	ŋ	‘balcony’
k	a	p	‘a measure of thumb and middle finger’
k <sup>h</sup>	o	m	‘pit’



s	ə	n	‘husband’
č	a	k	‘food’
m	ə	l	‘guest’
n	ə	r	‘lips’
h	o	k	‘pig’
l	ə	l	‘treasure’
r	ə	m	‘land’
w	o	l	‘direction’

### 1.6.3. Syllable Pattern

There are six monosyllabic patterns in Khoibu. They are given below:

1. V                /a/      ‘he’  
                      /i/      ‘they’
  
2. CV             /pa/      ‘father’  
                      /nu/      ‘mother’  
                      /la/      ‘song’  
                      /pu/      ‘maternal uncle’
  
3. VC             /um/      ‘god’  
                      /ən/      ‘curry’  
                      /uk/      ‘belly’  
                      /on/      ‘money’
  
4. CVC            /par/      ‘flower’  
                      /bun/      ‘hut’  
                      /čim/      ‘house’  
                      /rəm/      ‘land’
  
5. CCV            /t<sup>h</sup>ri/      ‘tear’  
                      /t<sup>h</sup>ro/      ‘thin’

6. CCVC      /tran/ ‘mosquito’  
                  /trim/ ‘needle’  
                  /t<sup>h</sup>rim/ ‘altogether’  
                  /t<sup>h</sup>leŋ/ ‘forever’

## 1.7. Tone

Khoibu is a tonal language and there are three tones in Khoibu, viz., rising, level and falling. I provide below a set of minimal pairs that demonstrate the phonemic status of all the three tones contrasting very distinctly. In most of the cases the vowel phoneme of the first segment bears level tone in disyllabic words. The rising tone is marked as ´ and the falling tone is marked as ˋ and the level tone is unmarked.

### Minimal Pairs of Tone Contrast in Monosyllabic Words

Rising tone	Level tone	Falling tone
/ná/ ‘leaf’	/na:/ ‘baby’	/nà/ ‘nose’
/lá/ ‘song’	/la:/ ‘fragment of a yarn’	/là/ ‘a small piece’
/čá/ ‘child’	/ča:/ ‘tea’	/čà/ ‘paddy’
/čáŋ/ ‘trap’	/čaŋ/ ‘shelf’	/čàŋ/ ‘capability’

### Minimal Pairs of Tone Contrast in Disyllabic Words

Rising tone	Level tone	Falling tone
/kə-nóm/ ‘to push’	/kə-nəm/ ‘filthy smell’	/kə-nèm/ ‘hot massage’
/mə-tí/ ‘seed’	/mə-ti/ ‘tender tissue’	/mə-tì/ ‘salt’
/kə-rén/ ‘sporadic	/kə-rən/ ‘to stop wild fire’	/kə-rèn/ ‘to stop
		quarrelling’
/kə-ná/ ‘to wear	/kə-na/ ‘falling ill’	/kə-nà/ ‘lacking behind’
a necklace’		

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Laishram Bijenkumar Singh, M.A, Ph.D.Scholar, NET  
Department of Linguistics  
Assam University  
Silchar-788011  
Assam  
India  
[bijenkumar1@gmail.com](mailto:bijenkumar1@gmail.com)