

Consonant Sequence and Syllable Formation in Asuri

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Abstract

The term *consonant sequence* in the present analysis refers to the combination of more than one consonants occurring across the syllable boundary. Unlike consonant sequences, the consonant clusters in Asuri are not very rich. All the sequences occur only in the medial position of words. On the other hand, syllable is a unit of pronunciation in phonology. Most of the syllables in the language are monosyllabic. However, di-syllabic, tri-syllabic, tetra-syllabic, and penta-syllabic words are also found in Asuri. The basic structure of Asuri syllables are VC, CV, and CVC. The present paper is an attempt by the researcher to describe the existing consonant sequences and syllable structures of Asuri in the light of modern synchronic approach.

Keywords: Asuri, Consonant sequence and syllable

Introduction

The speakers of Asuri are found mainly in the Gumla district of Chotanagpur area. They are also found in small scattered groups in the states of Chhattisgarh, West Bengal and Odisha. According to Grierson, G. A. 1903, “*Linguistic Survey of India*” Vol- IV, Asuri belongs to the Austro-Asiatic family of north Munda group. Jharkhand is one of the thickly populated states in India. The state is endowed with beautiful, flora-fauna, and many waterfalls. There are many indigenous languages spoken in the state like Ho, Bhumij, Mundari, Santali, Orang/Kurux, Birhor, Kol, etc. They have their rich culture but very few books and articles are written on their language. Asuris are rich in folk literature, which includes folk-tales, folk songs, folk-dances, riddles, proverbs, medicine, and craft etc. Moreover, Asuri folk literature makes available a picture of the society in which it flourished. The ways of life, customs, institutions, joys and sorrows are all reflected on the members of their community in folk literature.

1.1. Methodology

The primary data was collected in the form of conversation, questionnaire with as many informants of the language as possible and the data have been crosschecked with other speakers of the same variety. Finally, the data was recorded with the help of a tape recorder and transcribed for a closer study. The secondary data, which includes the available written materials in the form of books, journals, articles, etc., have been collected through library works. The persons of different age groups, professions, and sexes have been used as informants.

1.2. Scope and Orientation of the Study

The scope of this work is to provide a preliminary consonant sequence and syllable structure of Asuri spoken in Chotanagpur, Jharkhand. So, the review and evaluation of the written materials show that the Asuri language has not been extensively described and documented, i.e., the available written literature on this language is too scanty, incomplete and inconvenient to access. The expected contribution of the present study includes a sequence and syllable of structure of Asuri language.

2.0 Consonant sequence

Consonant sequence is a combination of two or more consonants across the syllable boundary while consonant cluster is a combination of two or more consonants occurring within the syllable. Asuri has a wide variety of consonant sequences. A consonant sequence in Asuri generally occurs in the word medial position. Therefore, the first member of the sequences are stops and nasals which are very frequent while fricatives, affricates, nasals, lateral, trill, and semi-vowels occupy the second members of the same. Sometimes fricative, lateral, and trill also act as first member. Hence the reverse order can also be seen. The occurrence of consonant C1 C2 and C2 C1 sequences in Asuri are also noticed. In Asuri, consonant sequence can be discussed under three different categories:

- (1) Geminates
- (2) Homorganic
- (3) Contiguous

2.1. Geminate

Asuri has geminate consonants. They occur word-medially and contrast with single consonants. Within a word the first member of the geminate forms the coda of the preceding syllable while the second member forms the onset of the immediately following one. Geminate are:

Nasal + Nasal consonants

-nm-	/manmauji/	‘selfishness’
-mn-	/damna bi:ŋ/	‘kind of a snake’
-ll-	/malla/	‘boatman’

2.2. Homorganic

Stop + Stop consonants:

Such type of the sequence of phonemes have similar feature either in place of articulation or manner of articulation as illustrated in the following examples:

-pt-	/hapta/	‘week’
-pd-	/dipdipi/	‘wagtail’
-tt-	/okka:tte/	‘where’
-dt-	/kuta:dtakiya	‘bloster’
-kt-	/lo:ktantr/	‘democracy’
-kt-	/sikta/	‘jackal’
-kc-	/ra:kčas/	‘demon’
-jg-	/majgui:t/	‘strong’

2.3. Contiguous

In this type of sequence, phonemes have adjacent or neighboring positions either in place or manner of articulation as can be seen in the following examples:

Stop + Fricative Consonant

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-ps- /ayu:psa:nj/ ‘evening’

Stop + Nasal Consonant

-pn- /apne/ ‘self’

Nasal + Stop consonants

-mp- /pamp/ ‘tap’

-mb- /tambu/ ‘tent’

-mt- /samtal/ ‘plain place’

-mʈ- /ʈomʈa/ ‘threat’

-mk- /gomke/ ‘husband’

-np- /anpaj/ ‘constipation’

-nʈ- /pulpant/ ‘anklet’

-nd- /ʈundu/ ‘hill peak’

-nc- /kainci/ ‘scissors’

-ŋd- /puŋdi/ ‘white’

-ŋk- /paŋka/ ‘fan’

Stop + Lateral/Trill consonants

-bl- /jo:bla/ ‘marsh’

-tr- /datro:m/ ‘sickle’

-dr- /udraka:r/ ‘dept’

-dʀ- /ʈedre/ ‘thunder’

-kr- /kakra/ ‘crab’

Nasal + Fricative Consonant

-ms- /gamsa/ ‘turban’

Nasal + Lateral/Trill consonants:

-ml- /gamla/ ‘plant pot’

-ŋl-	/ʃaŋli/	‘wild’
-ŋr-	/ʃaŋra/	‘pebble’
-ŋr-	/duŋri/	‘dust’

Fricatives + Stop and Nasal Consonants

-sp-	/a:spata:l/	‘hospital’
-st-	/asti:r/	‘slow’
-sʈ-	/ma:sʈer/	‘teacher’
-sk-	/hiska/	‘envy’
-sm-	/dusmani/	‘enmity’
-sn-	/kasna:r/	‘waist coat’

Lateral + Stop/Fricative and Nasal Consonants

-lt-	/galti//	‘fault’
-lc-	/dilcasp/	‘interesting’
-ld-	/ʃaldi/	‘soon’
-lk-	/ku:lki/	‘garden’
-lg-	/pahilgiri/	‘already’
-ls-	/alsi/	‘linseed’
-lh-	/malhan/	‘oinment’
-lm-	/ta:lme:l/	‘divorce’
-ln-	/pilniʃa:l/	‘fish net’

Trill + Stop/Fricative and Nasal Consonants

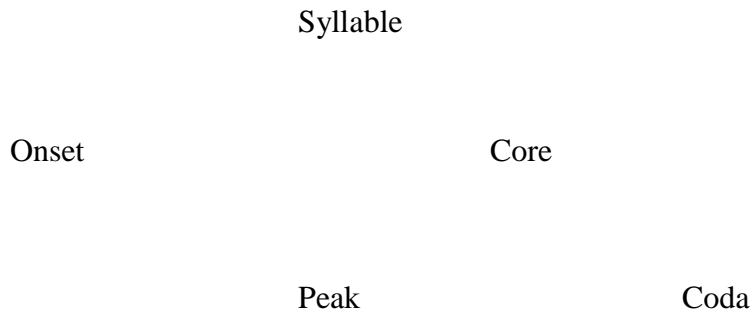
-rp-	/pitarpu:r/	‘harem’
-rt-	/dharti/	‘earth’
-rd-	/parda/	‘screen’
-rk-	/kirki/	‘ foot path ’

-rg-	/mirgi/	‘vertigo’
-rj-	/sarjo:m/	‘kind of a tree’
-rs-	/barsi:t o:t/	‘main land’
-rh-	/girhat/	‘granary’
-rm-	/larmusa/	‘caterpillar’
-rn-	/saran/	‘goddess’

3.0. Syllable

According to Catford (1988), the syllable is defined “as a minimal pulse of initiatory activity bounded by a momentary retardation of the initiator, either self imposed, or more usually, imposed by a consonant type of articulatory stricture”. A syllable is a vocalic unit or a unit of pronunciation of a vowel alone or a vowel with one or more consonants. So, a syllable in Asuri consists of a nucleus with or without an onset and with or without a coda. The nucleus or peak in the language is always a vowel. In other words, the vowel element is essential to the structure of an Asuri syllable; that is, a syllable is not possible without the vowel element.

Furthermore, if a syllable consists of only one sound, the sound will be a vowel as in *o* ‘he’. Generally the vowel element is essential to the structure of a syllable therefore the vowel obviously is the obligatory element in a syllable and is called its nucleus or peak. Like many other languages in the world, Asuri has three syllable segments: onset, peak and coda as in the word *siŋ* ‘tree’; the consonant *s* is the onset, the vowel *i* is the peak or the nucleus of the syllable and the consonant *ŋ* is the coda of the same.



A syllable ending in a vowel is called open syllable and a syllable ending in a consonant is called closed syllable. Like many other Austro Asiatic languages, only vowels make the nucleus of a syllable in Asuri i.e., there is no syllabic consonants in the language. The following fig:2 is the phonologic diagram of speech syllable proposed by Crissov (3 December 2010)

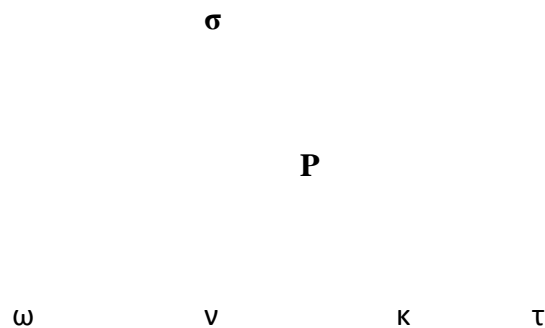


Fig 2: (σ), split into rime (ρ), onset (ω), nucleus (v), coda (κ) and tone (τ)

With respect to some phonological processes and counting, the vowel ending syllables are considered light syllable while the consonant ending as well as diphthongal syllables, i.e., the syllable where the coda is present and those in which the peak branches are considered ‘heavy’, e.g. /ka/ ‘what’ /ma/ ‘mother’ are light syllables while /am/ ‘mango’ /nau/ ‘boat’, /siŋ/ ‘tree’, /ain/ ‘low’ are heavy syllables. In other words, the peak and coda combined determines the syllable-weight, while onset plays no role in that. Thus, the peak and coda combine and form the rime node. If a flat structure is postulated erasing the peak and coda nodes under the rime, then the rule of syllable-weight may be formulated as follows:

In Asuri a syllable is heavy if the rime branches. For example, all the heavy syllables shown here have branching rims while the light ones have non-branching rims as follows:

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Heavy Syllable

σ		σ			σ			σ		
R	C		R	C	R			R		
a	m	n	a	u	s	i	ŋ	a	i	n

Light Syllable

	σ			σ				σ
	C	R		C	R		C	R
	k	a		m	a		c	a

It is also interesting to note that a word in Asuri may consist of one or more syllables. So, the maximum number of syllables in a word is five (penta) but their occurrence is very limited in the language. In Asuri, syllables can be classified into three major types: (i) mono-syllabic (ii) di-syllabic and (iii) tri-syllabic, (iv) tetra-syllabic and v) penta-syllabic. These are discussed in the following sections:

3.1. Monosyllabic Words

Monosyllabic words are consisting of single syllable. It is worth mentioning that the majority of the monosyllabic words have the CV pattern, but the monosyllabic words having VC pattern are also well attested in the language. It is also observed that even a vowel in Asuri can be a syllable or a morpheme or a word as shown below. Here the symbol V and C represents the vowels and the consonants respectively. Mono syllabic words having different types of syllabic structure are illustrated below

3.1.1. Open Syllable

V	/o/	‘he’
CV	/ma/	‘mother’
CVV	/nau/	‘boat’

3.1.2. Closed Syllable

VC	/iŋ/	‘I’
	/ut/	‘camel’
CVC	/siŋ/	‘tree’
	/das/	‘ten’

3.2. Di-syllabic Words

Di-syllabic words are those, which are consisting of two syllables. It is also observed that bi-syllabic roots are also frequently found in the language. Disyllabic words having different types of syllabic structure in Asuri are exemplified below:

3.2.1 The Second Syllable is Open

VCV	/o-re/	‘bird’
	/e-ṭa/	‘other’
V <u>VC</u> V	/ai-na/	‘mirror’
VCCV	/ek-la/	‘alone’
VCC <u>CV</u>	/in-dra/	‘well’
CVCV <u>V</u>	/mu-rai/	‘radish’
CVCV	/ba-ha/	‘flower’
	/jo-no/	‘broom’

3.2.2. The Second Syllable is Closed

CVCC	/pa-mp/	‘tube’
CVVC	/ba-id/	‘flood’

CCVC	/py-a:r/	‘love’
CVCVC	/mo-sam/	‘season’
	/pa-pad/	‘papad’
VCCVC	/an-pad/	‘illiterate’
	/ed-wa:r/	‘sunday’

3.3. Tri-syllabic

Tri-syllabic words are those, which are consisting of three syllables. The occurrence of tri-syllables words very frequently noticed in the language.

3.3.1. The Third Syllable is Open

VCVCV	/a-pa-ra/	‘feather’
VC VC CV	/e-ta-le/	‘why’
CVCVCV <u>V</u>	/me-me-sau/	‘mixer’
CVCCVCV	/nas-pa-ti/	‘pear’
CVCVCV	/jo-jo-?a/	‘acidity’
CVCVCV	/ba-hi-ra/	‘deaf’
CVCCVCCV	/kaṭ-kol-wa/	‘wood pecker’

3.3.2. The Third syllable is Closed

VCCVCVC	/eñ-ga-ku:l/	‘tigress’
VCCCVCCVC	/ins-pek-ṭar/	‘inspector’
CVCVCCVC	/na-ṭak-ka:r/	‘dramatist’
CVCVCVC	/pa-ṭa-wan/	‘irrigation’

3.4. Tetra-syllabic Words

Tetra-syllabic words are those, which are consisting of four syllables. Their occurrences are relatively observed in the language.

3.4.1. The Fourth Syllable is Open

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VCCVCV	/a-pa-ra-di/	‘criminal’
VCCVCVCCV	/en-ga-suk-ri/	‘pig’
VCCVCVCV	/en-ga-be:-ra/	‘ewe’

3.4.2. The Fourth Syllable is Closed

CVCCVCVCVC	/pat-la-la-ki:r/	‘line’
CVCCVCVCVC	/pat-la-ma-yai/	‘staff’
CVCVCVCVC	/bi-na-mo-yo:m/	‘anemia’

3.5. Penta Words

Penta syllabic words consist of five syllables. Penta words in Asuri are relatively less in number and it seems that penta-syllabic words are not very frequent like mono-, di- and tri-syllabic words. The penta-syllabic words structures are illustrated below:

3.5.1. The Fifth Syllable is Open

CVCVCVCV	/no-?a-ho-na/	‘through’
CVCVCVCV	/ja-ḍu-ta-ra/	‘comet’
CVCVCVCV	/sa-bu-da-na/	‘sage’

3.5.2. The Fifth Syllable is Closed

CVCVVCVCVCVC	/sa-hi-la-ya-num/	‘quill’
CVVCVCVCVCVCVC	/rai-ji-ra-si-ka/	‘drier’
CVCCVCVCVCV	/lar-mu-sa-ču-tu/	‘kind of a rat’

4. Conclusion

- i) Consonant clusters are very rare in Asuri. Instead, consonant sequences are very common.
- ii) Consonant sequences occur only in word medial position of the word.

iii) Three kind of consonant sequences are noticed, i.e., geminates, homorganic and contiguous.

iv) Generally, Asuri roots are of monosyllabic type. For instance, even a vowel can be a syllable or a morpheme or a word in the language. It is also observed that bi-syllabic roots are also frequently found in the language where as the occurrence of tetra and penta-syllabic words are very less in the language.

v) The most commonly used syllable pattern in Asuri is CVC.

vi) A syllable in the CV canonical form is called a light syllable and a syllable in CVV or CVC canonical form is called a heavy syllable.

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