Suprasegmental Features of Gulgulia

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Abstract

The present study provides a description of suprasegmental features of the language spoken by the Gulgulia community in Dhanbad, India. It briefly deals with the nasalization process, length of the vowel sounds, stress pattern, juncture, and intonation pattern in this language.

Keywords: Gulgulia, suprasegmental, nasalization, length, stress, juncture, intonation

1. The Gulgulia Community

The Gulgulias are a nomadic community, often found on the outskirts of villages, near railway stations or forests. Risley is reported to have been told, that the Gulgulias derive their name from a sound like *gul-gul,* which they make while stabbing squirrels with a rod. They are chiefly distributed in the states of Bihar, Jharkhand and Bengal. They speak Gulgulia which is the mother-tongue of the community reported in the paper, 'Mother Tongues of India according to the 1961 Census' by B. Mallikarjun. Since they are nomadic people, they have picked up other languages being used in the region and show traits of multilingualism.

The Gulgulias are divided into a number of exogamous patrilineal *gotras* like Sonarkheli, Kungera, Maldahia, etc. The community is aware of the *Varna* system. They consider themselves at the lowest rung of the *Varna* hierarchy. Their families are nuclear. They are nomadic people; therefore they have no immovable property. The movable property is inherited by the sons. The eldest son succeeds to the social offices, held by father.

They are a landless community. Traditionally, they earned money by arranging shows of animals but these days they beg or work as daily labourers in tea stalls or shops. Sometimes they collect honey from the jungle and sell it in the local *hat* (market).

They have no traditional caste council or a panchayat. They are Hindus. They worship Lakshmi, Sitala, Durga, Jagadmai Devi,etc.They make an altar below a tree to worship their Gods. They celebrate Durgapuja, Kalipuja, the Holi festival and participate in the annual festival of Karama.

They are illiterate. Their children do not go to school due to poverty and their nomadic lifestyle. However, in Patherdih area of Dhanbad (Jharkhand) there are three children having recently joined the school.

Gulgulia speech community shows signs for language shrinkage because the community is socially as well as economically extremely weak and poor. Moreover, the low numerical strength of the Gulgulia members also poses threat to its language. Although the members hold a very positive view towards their mother tongue & wish to see it promoted yet, the overall concept is that the language is facing a thrash due to its low prestige and no application in the outside domains. Even the group hardly enjoys any privilege as a part of governmental effort. All these may lead to language change and language convergence in the near future but if steps aren't taken for the preservation of the language, this may lead to language death, shift or loss.

Therefore, the necessity for arresting such linguistic erosion is essential through language planning and documentation, new policy initiatives, public awareness, technical, and financial support.

2. Suprasegmental Features

The term *suprasegmental features* refers to attributes that apply to a group of segments, rather than to individual segments.

2.1 Nasalization

Nasalization is produced by lowering the velum and allowing the air to escape through the nose while producing the sound by the mouth.

In Gulgulia, nasalization is a vital suprasegmental feature. It is distinctive and has a phonemic status. Its application in a word, brings about change in the meaning. All vowels can be nasalized in Gulgulia.

ʧaːʈa: *'lick'*   puʧʰi   *'ask'*

ʧãːʈa: *'slap*   pũʧʰi   *'tail'*

2.2 Length

In Gulgulia, length is distinctive and phonemic. It brings about change in meaning. There are three pairs of long and short vowels in this language: a a: , i i: , u u:

Eg: 1) ɖata: *'sustain'*

     ɖaːta: *'a kind of leafy vegetable'*

   2) ni   *'bring' (with third person object)*

    ni: *' I/ we take'*

2.3 Stress

Stress is the relative emphasis that may be given to certain syllables in a word, or to certain words in a phrase or sentence. It is neither a distinctive feature nor it brings phonemic contrast in Gulgulia.

Conditions where stress is usually applied in Gulgulia:

a) The syllable which precedes a consonant cluster which lies at the syllable boundary is stressed.

/ 'pipni /   *'eye-lashes'*

/ 'saffa /   *'clean'*

b) The first syllable gets stressed when:

i) In di-syllabic words, both syllables have long or short vowels.

/ ˈkukur /   *'dog'*
/ ˈtʰaːri: /   *'plate'*

ii) In di-syllabic words, either low-front or back-vowel is contained in the first syllable.

/ ˈkɛsan /   *'how'*
/ ˈpɔʋaːr /   *'electricity'*

iii) In tri-syllabic words, the first syllable has a long vowel, the second has a short vowel and the third has a long vowel.

/ ˈsuːkarvaːr /   *'Friday'*

c) The second syllable is stressed when:

i) In a di-syllabic word, the first syllable contains a short vowel and the second has a long vowel.

/ kirˈja: /   *'promise'*
/ munˈɖa: /   *'head'*

d) The last syllable is stressed, if there is a short vowel in the first syllable and long vowels in the last two syllables.

/ kaʋaːˈṛi: /   *'door'*

2.4 Juncture

Juncture is the manner of transition or mode of relationship between two consecutive sounds. It is the relationship between two successive syllables in speech.

In Gulgulia, the medial clusters have juncture as the sequence of consonant sounds does not occur in the same syllable.

gaʈ + ʈar   *'body'*

saf + fa   *' clean'*

Gulgulia exhibits a practice of pause at plus juncture in order to distinguish homophonic phrases.

dʰoi + ke   *'after washing'*

dʰo + ike   *'wash this'*

The difference between open and close juncture in Gulgulia can be seen in the following example:

Open juncture - du: + raʈ   *'two nights'*

Close juncture - du:raʈ   *'far'*

2.5 Intonation

Intonation is variation of spoken pitch that is not used to distinguish words; instead it is used for a range of functions such as indicating the attitudes and emotions of the speaker, signalling the difference between statement and question, and between different types of question, focussing attention on important elements of the spoken message and also helping to regulate conversational interaction.

Types of intonational pattern found in Gulgulia:

1) High-fall: Generally positioned after a negative particle.

   bi:ha: na ↓ bʰal ʧʰɔ

   'Marriage has not taken place'.

2) High-rise: Generally found in yes-no questions.

   ʧʰoɽija: bi:ha bʰal ↑ ki: na:i: ?

'Is the girl married or not?'

3) Rise-fall: Generally found in information questions.

↑ kadʱija: ↓ gɛlaʈ ʤʱrija: ?

'When did you go to Jharia ?'

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