

Articulating Consonant Phoneme of Rabha Dialect in Assam

Dr. Jaba Thakuria^{1*}, Krishnakhi Choudhury²

¹Associate Professor, Bongaigaon College, 0000-0002-6899-8909

²PhD Scholar, Mizoram University, 0000-0002-2780-3239

ABSTRACT

The paper tries to study the consonant phoneme of Rabha Dialect according to the point of articulation and the manner of articulation. Rabha Dialect has twenty two consonants. Consonants are used in every position. But the phoneme “ɲ” is not used in initially. In the Rabha dialect there are no uses of conjunct consonants before initial word or after final word. The Rabha Dialect is also a Tonal Dialect like other Tibeto-Burman Languages and it has contrastive uses in Phonemes. But now a day the contrastive uses of the Rabha phoneme values are reduced. Consonants are classified according to the place of articulation i.e. bilabial, labio-dental, dental, alveolar, palatal, velar, glottal etc., and the manner of articulation i.e. stop or plosive, fricative, affricate, nasal, lateral, trill, flap etc. Consonants are either aspirated or un-aspirated. A consonant can be described according to the nature of a sound pronounced such as the voiced or voiceless and the point of articulation & the manner of articulation.

Key words: Consonant, Phoneme, Articulation, Sound, Rabha Dialect.

INTRODUCTION

The Rabha are one of Assam's important plains tribes. Although they are linguistically categorised as Tibeto-Burman communities, they are ethnographically a part of the Mongoloid people. Their dialect belongs to the Bodo branch of the Tibeto-Burman linguistic family. However, the majority of the Rabha community has lost its native tongue and now refers to itself as an Assamese-speaking community because they speak Assamese at home and in social situations. The Rabhas are scattered over the unorganised regions of Goalpara, South Kamrup, Meghalaya, Darrang, Garo Hills, and other locations.

The Language is a medium of sharing ideas, thoughts and feelings of people. It is very essential to live properly in society. Without language and literature a nation will not survive for long time. The term "voicing" describes whether a consonant sound has a voice or not (like whispering), and in order to pronounce a consonant sound, articulators must release airflow in a specific way, which is referred to as the "manner of articulation." On the other hand the location in the vocal tract where the articulators - tongue, teeth, lips, or glottis make contact to pronounce consonant sounds is referred to as the point of articulation.

In Rabha phoneme Tone, Stress and External Juncture has played very important role. Phoneme is one of the basic units of language. Bloomfield and Daniel Jones have described phonemes in purely physical terms. It is the minimal unit of distinctive sound feature. According to most contemporary linguists however the phoneme is the minimal pair of relevant sound features. A phoneme is not sound; it can be realised only through one of its allophones, it is a class of sound, viz. Meat and neat, seat and feet etc.

Consonants are categorised based on where they are articulated, such as the bilabial, labio-dental, dental, alveolar, palatal, velar, and glottal areas, as well as how they are articulated, such as stop or plosives, fricatives, affricates, nasal, lateral, trill, and flaps. Consonants are either aspirated or un-aspirated. A consonant can be described according to the nature of a sound pronounced such as the voiced or voiceless, the point of articulation and the manner of articulation.

OVERVIEW OF LITERATURE

Efforts have been made to standardize the language and to impart education at the primary level through the mother tongue. 'The Bebak Rabha Kraurang Runchum' is a literary organisation for the development of the Rabha Dialect

(Rabha, 1981). The ‘Rabha Bhasa Parishad’ of Dudhnoi, another literary organisation has taken up seriously the case of developing this dialect in a scientific nature (Rabha, 1977). With this end in view the parishad has recently produced Rabha text books including Rabha grammar up to the primary standard. In their effort to evolve a correct base to Rabha grammar, the Parishad has studied ‘Rev. A.F. Stephen’S grammatical forms of the Rabha words in English (1900 A.D.)’; G.A. Grierson’s ‘Linguistic Survey of India – vol-3, part 2 (1903 A.D.)’; and those grammatical forms used by the British and foreign Bible Society in 1909 during the course of publishing ‘Jisuni Namkay Makay Sakay Katha’.

Additionally, considerable weight has been given to the grammatical writings of regional grammarians like Sri Jogendra Bantho and Sri Moni Rabha. Another literary group from Bondapara, the "Rabha Sahitya Gosthi," has been enhancing the above organization's original works. As a result, these organisations are working together to give the Rabha dialect its own unique identity.

Objective

1. To study the consonant phoneme of Rabha Dialect according to the point of articulation and the manner of articulation.
2. To study the consonant phoneme used in all positions in the word.

METHODOLOGY

The present study is based on the qualitative data collected through key informant interviews and field survey. The method adopted for the study is socio linguistic. Primary and Secondary method is also followed. In primary method data is collected from field survey. In field survey Questionnaire method is taken for different age groups. While in Secondary method necessary help has been taken from some reference books, journals, articles, Magazines, Bulletins, published and unpublished works were used intensively.

Collection of Data

For collecting data multistage sampling procedure was adapted to select district, block, villages and key informants. During field investigation it was necessary to visit some selected hilly areas in remote and interior places where Rabha Community resides, also with the informants of different age groups.

The selection of informants for intensive study was made on the following basis.

| Category of Informants | Informants Selected | Age Group |
|------------------------|--|---------------|
| Language | Teenagers & Old Age persons from Rabha Community | 14 – 55 Years |

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

In this part the study will discuss and analyse about consonant phonemes, consonants were according to place of articulation & manner of articulation, consonant phonemes according to the Assamese scripts and sub-categories of consonant phonemes.

Illustration of consonant of the Rabha Dialect:

There are twenty two consonant phonemes in the Rabha Dialect. The consonants are generally used in all positions in the words. These consonant phonemes of the Rabha Dialect are given below:

Table 1. Consonant Phonemes

| |
|---|
| <p>/p, ph, b, bh / /t, th, d, dh / /k, kh, g, gh / /ts, tsh, dz, dzh / /m, n, ŋ / /h, l, r /</p> |
|---|

Consonants are divided in to two ways, i.e. place of articulation and manner of articulation. These consonants are clearly shown in the chart below:

Table 2. Consonants according to Place of articulation & Manner of Articulation

| | | Place of Articulation | | | | | | |
|-----------|--------------|-----------------------|-----------|------------|------------|-----------|-----------|----------|
| | | Bilabial | | Alveolar | | Palatal | | Glottal |
| | | Unvoiced | Voiced | Unvoiced | Voiced | Unvoiced | Voiced | Voiced |
| Plosive | Un-aspirated | <i>P</i> | <i>b</i> | <i>T</i> | <i>d</i> | <i>k</i> | <i>g</i> | |
| | Aspirated | <i>Ph</i> | <i>bh</i> | <i>Th</i> | <i>dh</i> | <i>kh</i> | <i>gh</i> | |
| Affricate | Un-aspirated | | | <i>Ts</i> | <i>dz</i> | | | |
| | Aspirated | | | <i>tsh</i> | <i>dzh</i> | | | |
| Nasal | | | <i>m</i> | | <i>n</i> | | <i>ŋ</i> | |
| Fricative | | | | | | | | <i>h</i> |
| Lateral | | | | | <i>l</i> | | | |
| Trill | | | | | <i>r</i> | | | |

Manner of articulation

The above table presents twenty two essential phonemes in the Rabha Dialect, which are represented in writing by the script and finally it is accepted by the ‘Rabha Bhasa Parishad’ as the script of the Rabha Dialect. Table 3 represents the consonant phoneme and Assamese Script.

Table 3. Consonant Phonemes according to the Assamese Scripts

| Consonant Phoneme | Assamese Script |
|-------------------|-----------------|
| <i>p</i> | প |
| <i>ph</i> | ফ |
| <i>b</i> | ব |
| <i>bh</i> | ভ |
| <i>t</i> | ত |
| <i>th</i> | থ |
| <i>d</i> | দ |
| <i>dh</i> | ধ |
| <i>k</i> | ক |
| <i>kh</i> | খ |
| <i>g</i> | গ |
| <i>gh</i> | ঘ |
| <i>ts</i> | চ |
| <i>dz</i> | জ |
| <i>tsh</i> | ছ |
| <i>dzh</i> | ঝ |
| <i>m</i> | ম |
| <i>n</i> | ন |
| <i>ŋ</i> | ঙ |
| <i>h</i> | হ |
| <i>l</i> | ল |
| <i>r</i> | ৰ |

Sub-Categories of Consonant Phonemes:

The consonant phonemes are sub categorised according to the manner of pronunciation, i.e. Plosive, Affricate, Nasal, Fricative, Lateral, Trill. These are further sub categorised according to the place of articulation as given below:

1. Plosive: bilabial, alveolar, palatal
2. Affricate: alveolar
3. Fricative: glottal
4. Nasal: bilabial, alveolar, palatal

5. Lateral: alveolar
6. Trill: alveolar

Plosive are also sub divided in terms of phonation as shown below:

- i. Bilabial plosive: voiceless or unvoiced/ aspirated/ un-aspirated.
- ii. Alveolar plosive: voiceless/ voiced/ aspirated/ un-aspirated.
- iii. Palatal plosive: voiceless/ voiced aspirated/ un-aspirated.

The bilabial, alveolar, palatal, plosive and affricates exhibit in two term contrast- voiceless or voiced. The nasal, fricative, lateral or trills are all voiced.

Voiced and Unvoiced/ Voiceless:

Voice or voicing can refer to the articulatory process in which the vocal cords vibrate its primary use in phonetics to describe phones, which are particular speech sounds. The voiced consonants are /b/, /bh/, /d/, /dh/, /g/, /gh/, /dz/, /dzh/, /m/, /n/, /ŋ/, /l/, /r/. Unvoiced or voiceless sounds are weak and the vocal cords do not vibrate to produce the sound, there are eight voiceless sounds such as /p/, /ph/, /t/, /th/, /k/, /kh/, /ts/, /tsh/.

Brief Description of Consonant Phonemes

These twenty two consonant phonemes comprise of twelve plosives, four affricates, three nasals, one lateral or one trill. These phonemes were briefly described in table 4.

Table 4. Brief Description of Consonant Phonemes

| Consonant Phoneme | Brief Description |
|-------------------|---|
| <i>P</i> | bilabial unvoiced/ un-aspirated plosive |
| <i>ph</i> | bilabial unvoiced/ aspirated plosive |
| <i>b</i> | bilabial voiced/ un-aspirated plosive |
| <i>bh</i> | bilabial voiced/ aspirated plosive |
| <i>t</i> | alveolar, unvoiced/ un-aspirated, plosive |
| <i>th</i> | alveolar, unvoiced/ aspirated, plosive |
| <i>d</i> | alveolar, voiced/ un-aspirated, plosive |
| <i>dh</i> | alveolar, voiced/ aspirated, plosive |
| <i>k</i> | palatal, unvoiced/ un-aspirated, plosive |
| <i>kh</i> | palatal, unvoiced/ aspirated, plosive |
| <i>g</i> | palatal, voiced/ un-aspirated, plosive |
| <i>gh</i> | palatal, voiced/ aspirated, plosive |
| <i>ts</i> | alveolar, unvoiced/ un-aspirated, affricate |
| <i>tsh</i> | alveolar, unvoiced/ aspirated, affricate |
| <i>dz</i> | alveolar, voiced/ un-aspirated, affricate |
| <i>dzh</i> | alveolar, voiced/ aspirated, affricate |
| <i>m</i> | bilabial, voiced, nasal |
| <i>n</i> | alveolar, voiced, nasal |
| <i>ŋ</i> | palatal, voiced, nasal |
| <i>h</i> | glottal, voiced, fricative |
| <i>l</i> | alveolar, voiced, lateral |
| <i>r</i> | alveolar, voiced, trill |

All these consonant phonemes are used in the Rabha Dialect as in the other Tibeto- Burman languages. The un-aspirated unvoiced consonant phonemes were /p/, /t/, /k/, /ts/; and aspirated voiced phonemes were /bh/, /dh/, /gh/ are applicable in the Rabha dialect and these are also used as contrastive distribution in every position. But in the final position the aspirated phonemes are used as complimentary distribution with the un-aspirated consonant phonemes.

The nasal consonant phonemes are also used in all positions except the phoneme /ŋ/, which do not occur initially in the Rabha Dialect. Similarly the glottal voiced fricative phoneme /h/ is also not used finally in the Rabha Dialect. The alveolar fricative phonemes /ts/, /tsh/, /dz/, /dzh/ are pronounced as alveolar – homo- organic affricates.

Occurrence of consonant phonemes in all position

The consonant phonemes occur in all positions in the word that is initial, medial and final. Like in other languages phonemes were also used in Rabha Dialect at the initial, medial and at the final position of the words. Each phoneme has contrastive and complementary uses also they should have a particular meaning. These are illustrated below in the Table 5.1., 5.2. & 5.3.

Table 5.1. Occurrence of consonant phonemes in Initial

| Initial | | |
|------------|-----------------|---------------|
| Phonemes | Word | Meaning |
| <i>p</i> | <i>per</i> | Flower |
| <i>ph</i> | <i>phār</i> | Night |
| <i>b</i> | <i>bāk</i> | Pig |
| <i>bh</i> | <i>bhān</i> | To Delay |
| <i>t</i> | <i>tāri</i> | High Land |
| <i>th</i> | <i>thuchi</i> | Oil |
| <i>d</i> | <i>dādābrā</i> | Elder Brother |
| <i>dh</i> | <i>dhək</i> | Strength |
| <i>n</i> | <i>nā</i> | Fish |
| <i>ts</i> | <i>tsikā</i> | Water |
| <i>tsh</i> | <i>tshā</i> | Eat |
| <i>dz</i> | <i>jāo</i> | Fly |
| <i>dzh</i> | <i>jhunā</i> | Dry |
| <i>k</i> | <i>kāphāy</i> | Near |
| <i>kh</i> | <i>khoro</i> | Hair |
| <i>g</i> | <i>gorāy</i> | Horse |
| <i>gh</i> | <i>ghorliki</i> | Pigeon |
| <i>h</i> | <i>hā</i> | Soil |
| <i>r</i> | <i>rāk</i> | Angry |
| <i>l</i> | <i>lāluk</i> | Slung |

Source: Author

Table 5.2. Occurrence of consonant phonemes in Medial

| Medial | | |
|------------|-------------------|----------------|
| Phonemes | Word | Meaning |
| <i>p</i> | <i>tāpāk</i> | Butter Fly |
| <i>ph</i> | <i>āphe</i> | Star |
| <i>b</i> | <i>bābrā</i> | Father |
| <i>bh</i> | <i>ābhāk</i> | Broad |
| <i>t</i> | <i>ātāy</i> | To Throw |
| <i>th</i> | <i>kāthā</i> | Talk |
| <i>d</i> | <i>khodom</i> | Pillow |
| <i>dh</i> | <i>bādhā</i> | Obstacle |
| <i>n</i> | <i>māni</i> | Aunt |
| <i>ts</i> | <i>khutcun</i> | Tortoise |
| <i>tsh</i> | <i>ushā</i> | Hope |
| <i>dz</i> | <i>dzju, juju</i> | Grand Father |
| <i>dzh</i> | <i>cikā jhārā</i> | Fountain |
| <i>k</i> | <i>tākinā</i> | A Kind of Fish |
| <i>kh</i> | <i>mākhā</i> | Layer |
| <i>g</i> | <i>igāy</i> | This |

| | | |
|-----------|------------------|---------|
| <i>gh</i> | <i>bighāvikā</i> | Loan |
| <i>ŋ</i> | <i>āngchā</i> | Towel |
| <i>h</i> | <i>rāhā</i> | Hope |
| <i>r</i> | <i>lārā</i> | Widower |
| <i>l</i> | <i>lālā</i> | Stammer |

Table 5.3. Occurrence of consonant phonemes in Final

| Final | | |
|------------|----------------------|--------------------------|
| Phonemes | Word | Meaning |
| <i>P</i> | <i>Pāp</i> | Sin |
| <i>ph</i> | <i>Phāph</i> | Over Flow |
| <i>b</i> | <i>Khub</i> | Toes |
| <i>bh</i> | <i>Lābh</i> | Profit |
| <i>t</i> | <i>Pāt</i> | Wide Field |
| <i>th</i> | <i>Moth</i> | Temple |
| <i>d</i> | <i>Bād</i> | Success |
| <i>n</i> | <i>Nen</i> | Cloth |
| <i>ts</i> | <i>cāāch, chāāch</i> | Speedy |
| <i>tsh</i> | <i>mātsh, māsu</i> | Cow |
| <i>dz</i> | <i>bādz, bāj</i> | A Hawk |
| <i>dzh</i> | <i>Lājh</i> | Loan |
| <i>k</i> | <i>Kumpāk</i> | Nose |
| <i>kh</i> | <i>Dukh</i> | Sorrow |
| <i>g</i> | <i>Dāg</i> | Spot |
| <i>gh</i> | <i>Māgh</i> | Name of a Assamese Month |
| <i>n</i> | <i>Tāheng</i> | leg |
| <i>r</i> | <i>Phār</i> | Night |
| <i>l</i> | <i>Pāl</i> | Group |

Source: Author

CONCLUSION

In the western region of Assam, the Rabhas have been inhabited for centuries. Presently the Rabha language is transcribed, and it uses Assamese script. The structured pattern differs greatly in different language and dialects, and leads us to recognise different types of compound phonemes. We have seen that in comparison of vowel or consonant, consonants are easier to pronounce and record them easily in our mind. But we cannot pronounce consonants for longer period of time whereas vowels can be pronounced for longer period. Consonant is incomplete without vowels.

It is crucial to acquire the correct vowel or a consonant phoneme of the Rabha dialect before moving on to grammar if one wants to study the Rabha dialect. The uses of un-aspirated plosive: /*p, t, ts, k*/, and aspirated plosive: /*bh, dh, dzh, gh*/ phoneme are rare in other Tibeto-Burman Languages; but it has many uses in Rabha Dialect.

In Rabha dialect consonant have contrastive uses; they also occurred in initial, medial and final position of words, but in the final position the un-aspirated phoneme and aspirated phoneme used in complimentary. Consonants are distributed in either singly or in cluster.

In the present scenario the Rabha dialect is highly influenced by the neighbouring tribes belong to the both Indo-Aryan and Non Indo – Aryan groups. In case of pronunciation it is assimilated by other groups of people especially Assamese community.

Declaration of Conflicts of Interests

Both the authors declared that no potential conflicts of interest.

Funding Disclosure/Acknowledgement

The authors have not received any financial support for the research, authorship, and/ or publication of this research.

REFERENCES

- [1]. Bordoloi, B.N. (1867). Tribes of Assam, 123
- [2]. Barkataky, S.N. (1969). Tribes of Assam
- [3]. Barua, B.K. (1969). A cultural History of Assam
- [4]. Bantho, J.N. (1956). Rabha Jatir Itibritta
- [5]. Das, B.M. (1960). Ethnic Affinities of The Rabha, 11
- [6]. Endle, R.S. (1975). The Kacharis, 83
- [7]. Gait, Sir. E.A. (1963). A History of Assam
- [8]. Goswami, S.N. (1988). Studies in Sino Tibetan Language
- [9]. Grierson, G.A. (1903). The Linguistic Survey of India, vol-v, p-1
- [10]. Jose, U.V (2000). Rabha –English Dictionary Khúrangnala, Don Bosco publication, Guwahati.
- [11]. Rabha, Biren (1998). Rabha Janajati chamu Abhas
- [12]. Rabha, Hareswar (1981). Rabha Bhasa aru Eyar Gathan- an article in Assamese in the Souvenir of the Nikhil Rabha Chatra Santha, 1st year session Boko.
- [13]. Rabha, Heremba (1977). Rabha Samaj Sanskritir Gabesanar Dhara- an article in Assamese in the souvenir of the ‘Sodou Asom Tribal Sangha, 20th session, Guwahati.
- [14]. Rabha, Hakasam, Upen (1997). Rabha Bhasa Aru Sahitya
- [15]. Rabha, M. (1974): Rabha Janajati
- [16]. Rabha Bhasa Parishad. (1998). Rabha Byakaran; part – I, (Second edition)
- [17]. Rabha Bhasa Parishad. (1994). Rabha Byakaran; part - II