

Vowels of the Tai Aiton Language

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Abstract:

Tai Aiton is a unique language of North -East with unique characteristics in Phonetics, Morphology, Syntax etc. It is a tonal language. Phone or sound is a fundamental element of Language. It is an important area of linguistics. Two types of Segmental sounds are-Vowel and Consonant sounds. The sounds which are produced without any obstruction or stricture in the vocal tract, it is known as vowel. So, as a tonal language the vowels play a vital role in the Tai Aiton language. Aiton language is in endangered level; gradually the speakers of Aiton language have been decreased so an attempt has been chosen to highlight the Vowels of the Aiton language. In this paper the phonetic descriptions like: classification of vowel, vowel cluster, quality and use of vowel and vowel cluster have been chosen for study.

Keywords: *Phoneme, Vowel, Cluster, vowel quality, Tai Aiton.*

Introduction:

North-East India is a fascinating land of different language families, like: Sino-Tibetan, Austic, Indo-European, Dravidian etc. The Tibeto-Burman and Thai-Chin languages from Sino-Tibetan family are also found in North-East India. The Thai-Chin languages are found only in North-East India. The Tai languages that are found in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh are-Tai Khamti, Tai Aiton, Tai Phake, Tai Turung, Tai Khayang and Tai Ahom (*Boruah : 5*). Among these languages the Tai Aiton language has a few speakers which led a threat for the preservation of the language. Therefore scientific and systematic study is more important for the development of the language. In this prospect 'Vowel of the Aiton language' has been chosen for study. Through this topic I have tried to imply an attempt in systematic study of the language. Tai Aiton is a unique language with unique characteristics in Phonetics, Morphology, Syntax etc. It is a tonal language. So, as a tonal language the vowels play a vital role in the language.

Phone or speech sound is a fundamental element of Language. It is an important area of linguistics. Two types of Segmental sounds are-Vowel and Consonant sounds. The sounds which are produced without any obstruction or stricture in the vocal tract, it is known as vowel. Vowel sounds are produced through open configuration. On the contrary consonant sounds are produced through full of obstruction in the vocal tract. The vowel sounds are produced by the articulation of tongue and lip. The Vowel sounds are contrasted with each other in terms of auditory quality or characteristics. This article will be dealt with the phonology or vowel of the Tai Aiton language.

0.1 Objectives of Study:

- To give an introduction of the colloquial vowel of the Aiton language.
- To analyze the vowel quality, vowel contrasts and cluster through vowel analysis of the Tai Aiton language.

0.2 Methods of study:

For this paper different types of Data collection and data analysis methods are chosen. For data collection interview and observation methods have been adopted. In interview method data have been collected through recording. Sony Stereo Recorder ICD-UX560F is used as tools for data collection (*male 4100 Hz and female 2200 Hz*). The sounds or speech are kept in recording, the sounds have been taken through sincere observation and verification. For data analysis descriptive and analytical methods have been adopted.

1.0 Classifications of vowels in the Aiton language:

Six vowels are found in Aiton language. These are- / i, e, ə, a, ɔ, o, u / . Among these five have long forms. These vowels are- /i:, e:, a:, ɔ:, u: / . These vowels can be categorized in terms of the vowel height, length and nature of lip.

Front and Back of vowel:

Front: /i, e /

Central: /ə, a /

Back: /ɔ, o, u /

Height of vowel:

Close: / i, u /

Close-mid: / e, o /

Mid: / ə /

Open-mid: / ɔ /

Open: / a /

Lip of vowel:

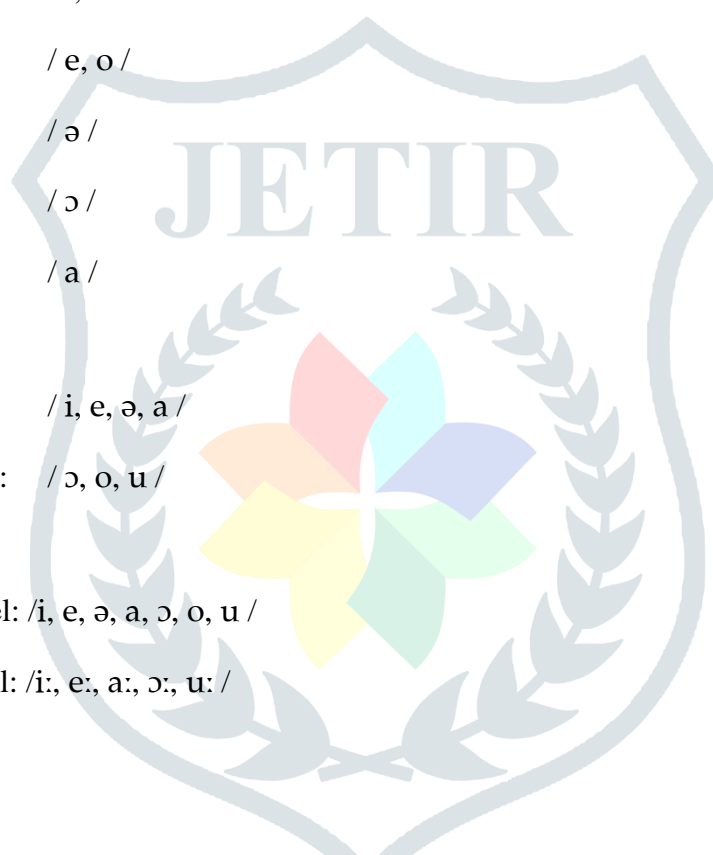
Rounded: / i, e, ə, a /

Unrounded: / ɔ, o, u /

Length of vowel:

Short vowel: /i, e, ə, a, ɔ, o, u /

Long vowel: /i:, e:, a:, ɔ:, u: /



Lip	Rounded				Unrounded	
	Front		Central		Back	
Back → height ↓	s. v.	l. v.	s. v.	l. v.	s. v.	l. v.
Close	i	i:			u	u:
Close-mid	e	e:			o	
Mid			ə			
Open-mid					ɔ	ɔ:
Open			a	a:		

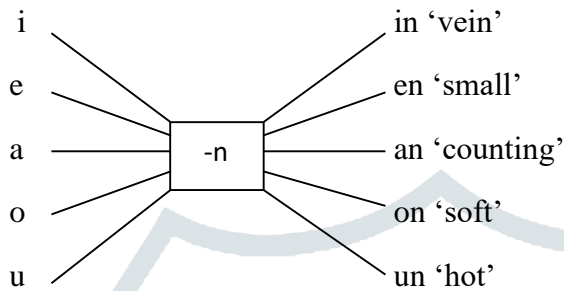
2.0 Vowel Contrasts in the Aiton language:

Vowel sounds are contrasted in initial, medial or final position in terms of identical or analogous environment. Phonemes are determined through contrasts analysis of sounds in phonemics. The following vowels of the Aiton language can be determined through contrasts analysis-

Initial Contrasts of the vowel:

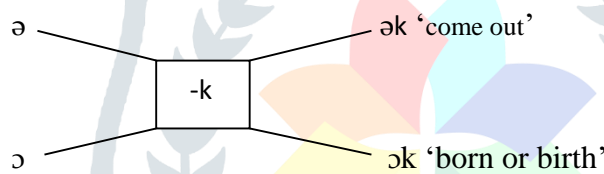
Identical environment: [- n]

Phoneme: /i, e, a, o, u /



Identical environment: [- k]

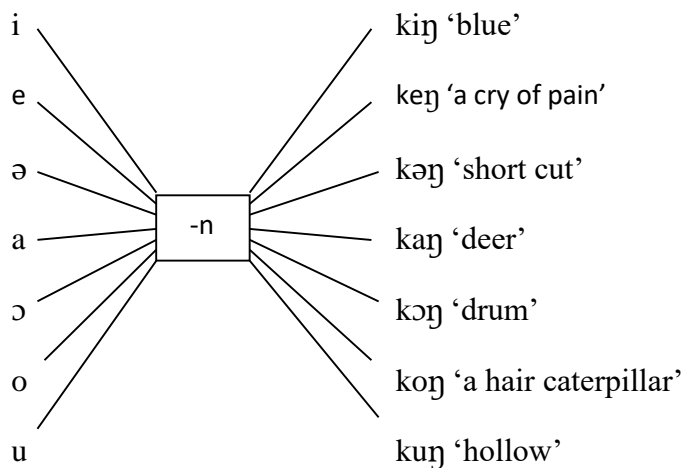
Phoneme: / ə, ɔ /



Medial Contrasts of the vowel:

Identical environment: [k - ŋ]

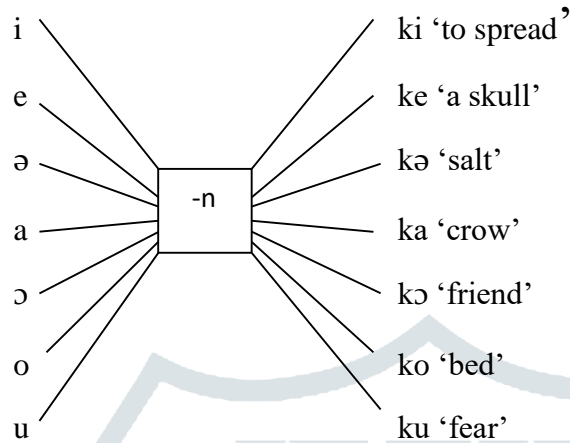
Phoneme: / i, e, ə, a, ɔ, o, u /



Final Contrasts of the vowel:

Identical environment: [k -]

Phoneme: / i, e, ə, a, ɔ, o, u /



The above vowels / i, e, ə, a, ɔ, o, u / in initial, medial and final position are ascertained as phoneme through phonetic contrasts in identical environment.

3.0 Vowel quality and it's uses:

The sound which is produced without any obstruction in the vocal tract is known as vowel. The vowels of Tai Aiton language are fully Obstruent and non-fricative. An illustration of vowel quality can be illustrated with examples as follows-

/i/ : It is a close front, unrounded vowel. This vowel is used in initial, middle and final position of a word or a syllable, [IPA No-301]. For example-

Initial		Middle		Final	
word	gloss	word	gloss	word	gloss
in	vein	niɿ	tea	k ^h ai	egg
ixiɿ	time	k ^h it	frog	ɯai	a stick made of cane

/e/ : It is a close-mid front, unrounded vowel. This vowel is used in initial, middle and final position of a word or a syllable, [IPA No-302]. For example-

Initial		Middle		Final	
word	gloss	word	gloss	word	gloss
en	small	heɿ	dry	namse	milk
e [~] k	a yoke	Ket	Chaff	k ^h e	net

/ə/ : It is a mid central, unrounded vowel. This vowel is used in initial, middle and final position of a word or a syllable, [IPA No-322]. For example-

Initial		Middle		Final	
word	gloss	word	gloss	word	gloss
ələ	Round	dən	month	mə	hand
ək	–	k ^h əm	bitter	kə	packet

/a/ : It is a open front, unrounded vowel. This vowel is used in initial, middle and final position of a word or a syllable, [IPA No-304]. For example-

Initial		Middle		Final	
word	gloss	word	gloss	word	gloss
ai	shame	u an	sun	ba	crasy
aŋ	dish	kao	owl	ana	uncle

/ɔ/ : It is a open mid back, rounded vowel. This vowel is used in initial, middle and final position of a word or a syllable, [IPA No-306]. For example-

Initial		Middle		Final	
word	gloss	word	gloss	word	gloss
ɔk	Come out	zɔm	thin	taikɔ	friend
ɔnna	in front	dɔj	hill	paikɔ	gone, past

/o/ : It is a close-mid back, rounded vowel. This vowel is used in initial, middle and final position of a word or a syllable, [IPA No-307]. For example-

Initial		Middle		Final	
word	gloss	word	gloss	word	gloss
on	soft	doŋ	a bamboo platter	lao	wine
oŋ-di	not good	k ^h oka	Seed corn	tao	Ash

/u/ : It is a close back, rounded vowel. This vowel is used in initial, middle and final position of a word or a syllable, [IPA No-308]. For example-

Initial		Middle		Final	
word	gloss	word	gloss	word	gloss
un	hot	kui	cotton	ku	fear
uhai	fever	kun	man	ŋu	snake

/i, e, ə, a, ɔ, o, u / all vowels of the Aiton language are used in initial, middle and final position of a word.

4.0 Vowel Cluster:

Vowel Cluster is a combination of different vowels. It is combination of one or two vowels. These combinations may be two or three vowels. In Aiton language two vowels clusters like— /iu, ei, eo, eu, ai, ao, au, ɔi/ and /ui / are found. These vowel clusters can be figured as follows.

	i	e	ə	a	ɔ	o	u
i							1
e	2					3	4
ə							

a	5					6	
ɔ	7						
o							
u	8						

SL	Cluster	Word	Gloss
1	iu	xiu	Teeth
2	ei	hei	lost
3	eo	nukkeo	Myna
4	eu	meu	Cat
5	ai	tai	Death
6	ao	dao	Star
7	ɔi	ɔi	sugarcane
8	ui	kui	Banana

5.0 Conclusion :

Through this discussion we found some findings as follows-

- Seven (7) vowels are found in Aiton language. These are- / i, e, ə, a, ɔ, o, u /. Each vowel has a long form.
- At present study the uses of vowel /ə/ is significant in the Aiton language. It is found in Central-mid position of a word.
- In Aiton language eight (8) types of two vowels cluster are found. These clusters found only in the final position.

The Aiton language is in endangered level. Systematic research is required for its development and preservation. Globalization has left a bad impact on this tribe's language-literature-culture so that the new generations have lack of sincerity about their language. If systematic study or research does not take in time, one day definitely it will lose its root.

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Sarma, Bhaskarjyoti. *Antarastriya Dhbanilipi Aru Asamiya Barnalipi Bhumikar*. Swastika Guwahati-03, 2nd published, 2011.

Native Speakers :

1. Konseng Thoumong (15), Dubarani shyam gaon.
2. Nomal Shyam (56), Tengani gaon.
3. Anghun Shyam (59), Borholla Shyam gaon.
4. Gonesh Shingpho (75), Balipathar.