

The Phonological Aspects of Nefamese

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Nefamese is the name given to the language spoken by different ethnic tribes in Arunachal Pradesh, not only among themselves but also with outsiders. It was developed when these different tribes came into contact with economically developed Assamese for verbal communication for trade & other socio-economical purposes. The different tribes viz. Nishi, Adi, Apatanai, Khampti, Hill Miri, Idu Mishimi, Nocte, Wanchu, Tagin, Mompā etc. have their own languages but those were mutually unintelligible i.e. one tribe did not understand the language of another tribe. Hence they started to use Nefamese as their contact language for oral communication as it was understood by everybody. Though Nefamese is mainly based on Assamese, it is also influenced by Hindi & English to a considerable extent.

So far as our research is concerned, we have found 6 vowel phonemes, 18 consonantal phonemes & 6 Diphthongs in Nefamese.

Vowels:

The vowels in Nefamese are as follows,

i e ə a: o u

While back vowels are rounded, the front & central vowels are unrounded. The vowels in Nefamese are voiced and oral. The description of the vowel phoneme is as follows-



Descriptions

/i/	close front unrounded
/e/	half-close front unrounded
/ə/	half close central unrounded
/a: /	open central unrounded
/o/	half-close back rounded
/u/	close back rounded

Above-mentioned vowel sounds are established on the basis of minimal pairs:

/i/	vs.	/u/	/ita:/	brick	/uta:/	get up
/i/	vs.	/a: /	/ita:/	brick	/a:ta:/	gum
/u/	vs.	/o/	/bura:/	old man	/bora:/	to fill
/i/	vs.	/o/	/tita:/	bitter	/tota:/	parrot
/i/	vs.	/e/	/bit/	vegetable	/bet/	cane
/u/	vs.	/a: /	/bul/	wrong	/ba:l/	good
/u/	vs.	/e/	/pul/	flower	/pel/	fails
/e/	vs.	/a: /	/bet/	cane	/ba:t/	rice
/e/	vs.	/o/	/ker/	thatch	/kor/	spade



/a: / vs. /o/ /ga:ri/ vehicle /gori/ clock
 /ð/ vs. /o/ /dðs/ ten /dos/ friend

Distribution of vowels:

All the vowels occur in all the three positions-

Initial position:

/i/ /ita:/ brick
 /e/ /ekta:/ one
 /ð/ /ðto/ auto rickshaw
 /a:/ /a:ji/ today
 /o/ /okra:/ simpleton
 /u/ /ut/ camel

Medial position:

/i/ /din/ day
 /e/ /pet/ stomach
 /ð/ /mðndir/ temple
 /a:/ /ma:s/ fish
 /o/ /gor/ house
 /u/ /pul/ flower

Final position:

/i/ /a:ji/ today
 /e/ /potokke/ suddenly
 /ð/ /gundð/ smell
 /a:/ /murga:/ cock
 /o/ /ma:nso/ meat



/u/ /ja:du/ magic

Diphthongs:

Though no triphthong is found, Nefamese has 6 diphthongs. They are as follows-

/a:i/ as in /a:ina:/ mirror

/a:u/ as in /na:u/ boat

/ia:/ as in /dukia:/ poor

/ua:/ as in /sua:li/ girl

/ui/ as in /jui/ fire

/oi/ as in /homoi/ time

Of these 6 diphthongs, three moves towards [i]. They are /a:i/, /ui/ & /oi/; one moves towards [u] as /a:u/; & the other two moves towards [a:] as /ua:/ & /ia:/. Except /a:i/ the other 5 diphthongs don't occur in the initial positions. The occurrence of the six diphthongs in the three positions are shown as follows-

/a:i/	Initial position	/a:ina:/	mirror
	Medial position	/pa:ika:na:/	stool
	Final position	/doba:i/	medicine

/a:u/	Initial position	not found till now
	Medial position	/ta:un/ town
	Final position	/na:u/ boat



/ia: / Initial position not found till now
 Medial position /goria:l/ crocodile
 Final position /dukia:/ poor

/ua: / Initial position not found till now
 Medial position /sua:li/ girl
 Final position /ra:tipua:/ morning

/ui/ Initial position not found till now
 Medial position /duita:/ two
 Final position /jui/ fire

/oi/ Initial position not found till now
 Medial position /poisa:/ money
 Final position /toi/ you

Consonants:

There are 18 consonantal phonemes in Nefamese. Among 18 consonants, there are 6 stops & 12 continuants. Among stops there are 3 voiced & 3 voiceless phonemes. All the stops are unaspirated. Among the continuants, there are 3 nasals, 3 fricatives, 2 affricates, 1 trill, 1 lateral & 2 approximants.

The nasals, trill, lateral & approximants are voiced. Where the fricatives are voiceless, among affricates 1 is voiced and the other 1 is voiceless. No aspirated phoneme is found in Nefamese.

The following is the list of consonants & its descriptions-



<u>phoneme</u>	<u>Descriptions</u>
/p/	voiceless unaspirated bilabial stop
/b/	voiced unaspirated bilabial stop
/t/	voiceless unaspirated alveolar stop
/d/	voiced unaspirated alveolar stop
/k/	voiceless unaspirated velar stop
/g/	voiced unaspirated velar stop
/m/	voiced bilabial nasal
/n/	voiced alveolar nasal
/ŋ/	voiced velar nasal
/s/	voiceless alveolar fricative
/ʃ/	voiceless palatal fricative
/h/	voiceless glottal fricative
/č/	voiceless unaspirated palatal affricate
/j/	voiced unaspirated palatal affricate
/r/	voiced alveolar trill
/l/	voiced alveolar lateral
/w/	voiced bilabial approximant
/y/	voiced palatal approximant

The consonantal sounds are established on the basis of minimal pairs & where no minimal pairs are available; sub- minimal pairs have been used for the purposes.



/p/	vs	/b/	/pet/	stomach	/bet/	cane
/t/	vs	/d/	/ta:n/	hard	/da:n/	paddy
/k/	vs	/g/	/ka:li/	tomorrow	/ga:li/	abuse
/m/	vs	/n/	/ka:m/	work	/ka:n/	ear
/n/	vs	/ŋ/	/ka:n/	ear	/koŋ/	anger
/m/	vs	/ŋ/	/ka:m/	work	/koŋ/	anger
/s/	vs	/š/	/sati/	umbrella	/ša:ti/	sixty
/š/	vs	/h/	/ša:t/	seven	/ha:t/	hand
/č/	vs	/j/	/čula:/	stove	/jola:/	to burn
/r/	vs	/l/	/ra:ti/	night	/la:ti/	stick
/w/	vs	/y/	/ta:wa:/	frying pan	/ta:ya:/	a name

Distribution of Consonants:

So far as our research is concerned till now, most of the consonants occur in all the three positions of words. The 4 consonants which cannot occur in the final position are /h/, /č/, /w/ & /y/. Again /ŋ/ & /y/ cannot occur in the initial position of a word in Nefamese.

The following examples are given to show the occurrence of the 18 consonantal phonemes in the three positions:

/p/	Initial	/pa:ni/	water
	Medial	/ka:pur/	cloth
	Final	/tep/	tap
/b/	Initial	/ba:k/	tiger
	Medial	/jibon/	life
	Final	/šob/	all



/t/	Initial	/ta:n/	hard
	Medial	/kita:p/	book
	Final	/but/	ghost
/d/	Initial	/da:m/	cost
	Medial	/goda:m/	godown
	Final	/dud/	milk
/k/	Initial	/ka:m/	work
	Medial	/a:ka:š/	sky
	Final	/na:k/	nose
/g/	Initial	/get/	gate
	Medial	/ba:ga:n/	garden
	Final	/ʃog/	jug
/m/	Initial	/ma: /	mother
	Medial	/a:tma:/	soul
	Final	/ka:m/	work
/n/	Initial	/na:k/	nose
	Medial	/ča:ndi/	silver
	Final	/ka:n/	ear
/ŋ/	Initial	not found	till now
	Media	/leŋta:/	naked
	Final	/roŋ/	colour
/s/	Initial	/sua:li/	girl
	Medial	/ma:ŋso/	meat
	Final	/dos/	friend



/š/	Initial	/ša:di/	marriage
	Medial	/tiša:r/	teacher
	Final	/a:ka:š/	sky
/h/	Initial	/ha: ĵra:/	wage
	Medial	/pa:ha:r/	hill
	Final	not found till now	
/č/	Initial	/čula:/	stove
	Medial	/ba:ča:/	child
	Final	not found till now	
/ĵ/	Initial	/ĵui/	fire
	Medial	/a:ĵi/	today
	Final	/la:loĵ/	greed
/r/	Initial	/ra:ti/	night
	Medial	/a:ru/	and
	Final	/ker/	thatch
/l/	Initial	/la:ti/	stick
	Medial	/ĵola:/	to burn
	Final	/pul/	flower
/w/	Initial	/wul/	wool
	Medial	/ta:wa:/	tawa
	Final	not found till now	
/y/	Initial	not found till now	
	Medial	/boyok/	age
	Final	not found till now	



Syllabic pattern:

Monosyllabic word:

Open monosyllabic words:

v: /i/ he/she
cv: /ma:/ mother
cvv: /toi/ you

Closed monosyllabic words:

vc: /a:m/ mango
cvc: /na:k/ nose

Disyllabic word:

Open disyllabic words:

vcv: /i-ta:/ brick
cvcv: /ma:-nu/ man

Closed disyllabic words:

cvcvc: /pa:-ha:r/ hill
vcccvc: /ek-tres/ actress

Trisyllabic words:

Open trisyllabic words:

vcvcv: /a:-ŋu-ti/ ring
vccvcv: /un-no-ti/ progress

Closed triyllabic words:

cvcvcvc: /hi-ho-tor/ their



vcvccvc: /i - lek: - sɔ̃ n/ election

So far as our research is concerned, no tetrasyllabic word is found in Nefamese.

Consonant clusters & sequences:

In Nefamese consonant clusters occur only in initial & final position whereas a lot of consonant sequences occur in the medial position.

Initial clusters:

So far as our research is concerned Nefamese does not allow more than two consonants initially in a word. While the 1st member of the cluster is a stop, the 2nd member of the cluster is a trill (/r/).

/pr/	/pra:i/	fry
/tr/	/tris/	thirty

Final clusters:

A very few numbers of final clusters of consonants are found in Nefamese:

/mp/	/kemp/	camp
/nd/	/na:ga:lend/	nagaland

Medial Sequences:

So far as our research is concerned, a good number of medial sequences of consonants are found in Nefamese. While in the most of the medial sequences the 1st number is a stop, the second member may be a stop, a nasal, a fricative, an affricate, a trill or a lateral.

stop+stop :	/kt/	/ekta:/	one
stop+ nasal:	/tm/	/a:tma:/	soul
stop+ fricative:	/kš/	/ekšo/	hundred



stop+affricate : /bʃ/ /sobʃi/ vegetables
 stop+ trill: /kr/ /kekra:/ crab
 stop+ lateral: /gl/ /pa:gla:/ mad

However it is also found that nasal, affricate, trill or lateral occupy the 1st membership in the medial sequences to a considerable extent.

nasal + stop : /nb/ /ka:nda:/ cry
 affricate+ trill: /ʃr/ /ha:ʃra:/ wages
 trill + stop: /rg/ /murga:/ cock
 lateral+ nasal: /lm/ /a:lma:ri/ cupboard

Besides this, it is also found that in Nefamese a very few number of three consonant sequences occur in the medial position. The 1st member is either a voiceless stop or a nasal. The 2nd member is usually a stop and the 3rd member is always a trill.

/ktr/ /ektres/ actress
 /ntr/ /untris/ twenty-nine

Geminates:

So far as our research is concerned, in Nefamese the unaspirated stops, the nasals, the affricates form germinates in the medial position.

/tt/ /pittibi/ earth
 /nn/ /unnoti/ progress
 /ʃʃ/ /uʃʃol/ bright

Supra-segmental Feature:



Stress:

The primary stress, written /' /, falls in first syllable of monosyllabic words and also in the open ended disyllabic as well as tri-syllabic words.

/'ma:/ mother

/'a:m/ mango

/'okra:/ simpleton

/'dðrmoha:/ salary

In case of closed ended disyllabic and trisyllabic words. The primary stress falls on second syllable.

/de'ga:r/ dagger

/mi'nista: r/ Minister

So far as our data is concerned no tetrasyllabic words have been found in Nefamese.

Again where there is a diphthong in a word, the primary stress falls on the diphthong.

/'poila:/ First

/'gutei/ All

Morphophonemics:

Morphophonemics is the analysis & classification of phonological factors which affect the appearance of morphemes.

Morphophonemics or Sandhi (joining in Sanskrit) are forms which have gone through specific modifications in specific circumstances in Nefamese.

In Nefamese Sandhi forms are of two types – internal and external Sandhi. In internal Sandhi variations are confined to the arrangement of morphemes



within the words. So far as external sandhi is concerned variations are extended to the arrangement of words within phrases, clauses or sentences.

External Sandhi:

The final /or/ of a noun/ noun phrase is dropped when it is followed by a post position in a sentence.

/tebul/ + /or/ + /uporðt/ = /tebul uporðt/

Table of on on the table

/rum/ + /or/ + /bitðrðt/= /rum bitðrðt/

Room of inside in the room

Internal Sandhi:

(1) An /i/ is added before borrowed English words beginning with a consonant cluster having /s/ as the first number of the cluster.

/skul/ - /iskul/ school

/stet/ - /istet/ state

(2) The medial consonant sequence of /str/ is broken by inserting an /i/ between /st/ and /r/.

/mistri/- /mistiri/ carpenter

/istri/ -/ istiri/ Iron

(3) The last consonant of the final consonant cluster is dropped in case of borrowed Hindi/English words.

/dost/- /dos/ friend

/post/- /pos/ pillar



So we hope that our study will help in preserving Nefamese which is, in fact, necessary as it is the only lingua franca of Arunachal Pradesh which is understood by different communities.



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