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Phonological Survey Report of the Kulunge Language

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PHONOLOGICAL SURVEY REPORT

OF

THE KULUNGE LANGUAGE

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A. Introduction.

B. Consonants.

1. Phonetic Work Chart.	2
2. Evidence of Contrast.	2
3. Interpretation.	4
4. Variation.	5
5. Distribution.	5
6. Glottal Stop.	6

C. Vowels and Suprasegmentals.

1. Phonetic Work Chart.	6
2. Evidence of Contrast.	7
3. Pitch.	7
4. Variation.	7

5. Distribution of Vowels. 8

D. Syllable Patterns.

1. Syllable Types. 9

2. Distribution. 10

E. Phonemic Inventory.

F. Residues.

References.

A. Introduction.

Kulunge is the language spoken by the Kulunge Rai; it is one of the languages of the Khambu group of the Rai or Kiranti. The speakers themselves refer to their language as Kulu Ring (language of the valley). The language is spoken along the upper parts of the Hongu river (a tributary of the Dudhkosi) and along the Sanangukuwa river (a tributary of the Arun), both in East Nepal (Solu Khumbu District and Sankuwa Sabha District respectively). The main area of Kulunge is the Hongu valley with a total of ten villages and approximately 8000 - 10,000 speakers. No information is available at this time on the number of villages and speakers in the Sanangukuwa valley. Sotange, the language spoken in the lower parts of the Hongu valley, is very closely related to Kulunge and can safely be regarded as a dialect of Kulunge. Both languages are mutually intelligible, but the speakers are aware of differences in phonology as well as in lexicon and grammar. From the neighbouring Rai languages, Khalinge Rai of the Dudhkosi valley seems to be most closely related to Kulunge (cf. Toba, 1972). However, Kulunge and Khalinge are mutually unintelligible.

The data for this report have been collected during four short periods in Bung, the largest village of the upper Hongu, between 1971 and 1972. The main informant was Krishna Prasadh Rai, a native of Bung of about 38 years of age.

The research was carried out under the auspices of the Summer Institute of Linguistics Nepal, and the Institute of Nepal and Asiatic Studies, Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu, Nepal.

B. Consonants.

1. Phonetic Work Chart.

p	t	ts	k	ʔ
ph	ph	th	tsh	kh
b	ɓ	d	dz	g
bh	dh	dzh	gh	
		s	š	sʲ
				h
		[z]*		
	r	ř		
	l			
m	n		ŋ	
w			y	

* [z] has occasionally been observed during native conversations, but no example has been found so far in the data.

2. Evidence of Contrast.

Bilabial Stops

[päti]	veranda	[pu]	snake
[phäŋa]	handwoven jacket	[phur]	dust
[bätho]	kukuri	[bu]	elder brother
[bhəso]	I cry	[bhəm]	to weave

Dental Stops

[toŋo]	I come	[tupri]	bone
[thuŋo]	I pierce	[thəti]	thumb
[duŋo]	I drink	[duŋə]	he drinks
[dhuŋo]	I dig	[dhuŋri]	nose ornament

Velar Stops

[kätsä]	day before yesterday	[koŋə]	I
[khätə]	he buys	[khoŋə]	he looks
[gətha]	got, cowshed	[ŋa]	fish
[ghätte]	he sharpens	[gara]	wall

Affricates

[tsou]	heart	[tsara]	bark
[tshou]	sugarcane	[tshara]	goat
[dzowa]	yoke		
[tsom]	he eats		
[dzom]	to plough		
[dzha]	cooked rice		

Fricatives

For the alveolar fricatives [s] and [z], no contrasting pair has been found yet.

Laterals

[lum]	belly	[li.tsi]	four
[rum]	salt	[rä.tsi]	seven

Nasals

[ma]	no	[nobo]	ear
[na]	elder sister	[ɲobo]	face
[ɲa]	fish		

Semi-Vocoids

[yatsibim]	broom
[watsa]	man

3. Interpretation

Aspiration

No non-suspicious word-initial consonant clusters have been found; therefore aspiration can be interpreted as consonant modification:

[ph]	= /p ^h /	/p ^h ur/	dust
[th]	= /t ^h /	/t ^h ɛti/	thumb
[tsh]	= [ts ^h]	[ts ^h ara]	goat
[kh]	= /k ^h /	/k ^h im/	house
[bh]	= /b ^h /	/b ^h aso/	I cry
[dh]	= /d ^h /	/d ^h uyo/	I dig
[dzh]	= [dz ^h]	[dz ^h a]	cooked rice
[gh]	= /g ^h /	/g ^h am/	body

Affricates

No non-suspicious word-initial consonant clusters have been found; therefore affricates can be interpreted as a single consonant.

[ts]	= /c/	/cou/	bird
[ts ^h]	= /c ^h /	/c ^h ou/	sugarcane

aspirated voiceless stops, and all affricates occur only syllable-initially.

Consonant clusters have only been observed syllable-finally. There is evidence of only the following consonant clusters: /ks/, /ms/, and /lm/.

/muks/	eye
/tams/	to do
/celm/	bamboo mat

A cluster of identical consonants across a syllable boundary is pronounced as one lengthened, unreleased consonant, but represents two segments phonemically.

[tup•o] /tuppo/ husband

6. Glottal Stop.

Glottal stop has only been found separating two identical vowels in a sequence. This being the rule, glottal stop does not have phonemic status.

[maʔa]	/maa/	mother
[boʔo]	/boo/	younger father

C. Vowels and Suprasegmentals.

1. Phonetic Work Chart.

i	i•	(ü)	u	u•
e•		ə	e•	
ä*				
a	a•		o	o•

*[ä] represents the sound traditionally written [ɛ].
(Mid open front vowel)

2. Evidence of Contrast.

/lis/	millet	/k ^h er/	wound	/ŋi/	to cook
/lem/	tongue	/k ^h er/	fence	/ŋe/	mouth
/lam/	trail			/ŋa/	fish
/lum/	stomach			/pu/	snake
/lon/	foot			/bo/	pig
/sem/	lung				

High front rounded [ü] has so far only been observed in [tüe], 'he is'. However, in careful, slow speech, it is pronounced [tuie].

3. Pitch.

No in-depth study of the pitch/tone system of the Kulunge language has been undertaken so far. Initial investigation revealed a general picture of high and low syllable pitch.

/k ^h óm/	to look (high)	/b ^h ém/	to weave
/k ^h òm/	to bite (low)	/b ^h èḿ/	to dry (tr.)
/wém/	to untie	/pím/	to give
/wòm/	to climb	/pìḿ/	to say

4. Variation.

Vowel Length

Vowel length is connected with the pitch system. The general rule seems to be that high pitch conditions lengthening of the vowel, making vowel length non-distinctive. So far, differences in vowel length have been observed only in monosyllabic words and in the first stressed syllable of bi-syllabic words. Further study of the pitch system should throw more light on this area.

[kó.m]	/kóm/	to bite	[nòŋ]	/nòŋ/	snow
[mé.r]	/mér/	tail	[lám]	/lèm/	tongue
[tsí.r]	/cír/	spine	[níŋ]	/níŋ/	name
[t ^h á.m]	/t ^h ám/	post	[nám]	/nám/	sun
[t ^h é.p]	/t ^h ép/	forehead			
[ló.bä]	/lóbe/	worm	['bòho]	/'bòho/	mud
[sí.tso]	/sícó/	tree	['nìtsi]	/'nìci/	one
[tsá.bi]	/cábi/	lock	['gàra]	/'gàra/	wall

Variants of /e/

[e:] ~ [ä] are variants conditioned by the length/pitch pattern. [e:] occurs as the long variant with high pitch, [ä] as the short variant with low pitch.

[mé.r]	/mér/	tail	[lám]	/lèm/	tongue
[sé.r]	/sér/	rice	[s ^v än]	/sèn/	finger nail

5. Distribution of Vowels.

Vowel clusters across syllable boundaries are possible in many combinations. They are distinguished as belonging to two separate syllables by the stress pattern. Normally, the first vowel in the sequence is stressed.

/'bu -a]	elder brother
,'ka'ci -a/	sickle
/'ŋi -ə/	he cooks

But stress on the second vowel of the sequence is also possible.

/pu'ŋe/	it floats
/tari'un/	big ear ornament
/ŋi'o/	I cook

A second group consists of clusters of two vowels within one syllable, carrying only one stress. The second segment in the sequence is always one of the high vocoids [i] or [u]. Since the high vocoids otherwise occur in the normal vowel patterns (notice the occurrence of [i] in first position in clusters across syllable boundaries), they are best interpreted here as nonsyllabic segments of vowel clusters. They have been found in:

a) open syllables, with the second member as a nonsyllabic margin of the syllable:

[kau]	/ka ^u /	water
[tei]	/te ⁱ /	clothing
[kai]	/ka ⁱ /	lower leg

b) closed syllables, as close-knit nuclei:

[lais.pi]	/la ⁱ s.pi/	in front of
[tsi.baip]	/ci.ba ⁱ p/	short

D. Syllable Patterns.

1. Syllable Types.

Seven syllable types have been observed in Kulunge:

- | | | |
|--------|----------|-----------------------|
| (1) V | (3) CV | (6) CV ^v |
| (2) VC | (4) CVC | (7) CV ^v C |
| | (5) CVCC | |

These types are illustrated as follows:

(1) V	/o - mi/	my
(including syllabic nasals)	/e - se/	today
	/ŋ - kə/	he, this

(2) VC	/es - pa/	yesterday
	/im - so/	I sleep
(3) CV	/pu/	snake
	/bo/	pig
	/ŋa/	fish
(4) CVC	/toŋ/	head
	/səm/	breath
	/lem/	tongue
(5) CVCC	/muks/	eye
	/tams/	to do
	/celm/	bamboo mat
(6) CV ^v	/mu ⁱ /	hair
	/ka ^u /	water
	/po ⁱ /	throat
(7) CV ^v C	/ci.ba ⁱ p/	short
	/la ⁱ s.pi/	in front of

2. Distribution.

Predominant in Kulunge are monosyllabic and bisyllabic words. Trisyllabic words are rare, and only a few examples have been observed with more than three syllables in a word. Among the monosyllabic words, CVC is the most frequent; among the bisyllabic, CV.CV. A word pattern count from the Swadesh-100 word list may serve as a representative example (V^v is considered as one single V).

Kulunge Phonological Survey - 11

CV.CV	35	V.CV	2
CVC	20	VC	1
CV	15	V.CVC	1
CVC.CV	10	VC.CVC	1
CV.CV.CV	5	VC.CV	1
CVC.CV.CV	3	CVCC	1
CV.CV.CV.CV	3	CV.V	1
CV.CV.CVC	2	CV.V.CV	1
CV.CVC	2		

E. Phonemic Inventory.

p	t	c	k	
p ^h	t ^h	c ^h	k ^h	
b	d	j	g	
b ^h	d ^h	j ^h	g ^h	
		s		h
		z		
	r			
	l			
m	n		ŋ	
w			y	
	i		u	
	e	ə		(' ')
	a	ʔ		

F. Residues.

The pitch and stress patterns of Kulunge need further careful investigation. This should not only bring evidence of their phonemic status, but also help to determine the units of higher levels of the phonological hierarchy, as phonological word and phrase.

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