RESEARCH ARTICLE

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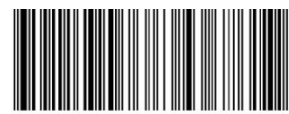
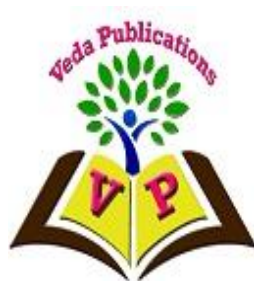# SEGMENTAL PHONEMES OF LAIRAMLO

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ABSTRACT

Lairamlo is the name of the dialect, which is spoken by the Ringpam people in the Ringpam village of Chandel district of Manipur which have 440 (approximately) speakers. Lairamlo is a dialect of Tangkhul. Lairamlo belongs to the Kuki-Chin-Naga sub-group of Tibeto-Burman family (Grierson's LSI, 1903).

The paper will describe the phonemic inventory of the dialect in terms of number of vowels, consonants and diphthongs including their distribution and arrangement in the dialect. The data was collected from Ringpam village of Tengnoupal district of Manipur through questionnaire and interview method.

Keywords: *Phonemes, Lairamlo, Tengnoupal, Manipur.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Lairamlo is a dialect of Tangkhul. Tangkhul is one of the schedule tribes of Manipur. Tangkhul has many dialects. Arokianathan (1987) noted that there are 219 Tangkhul villages and it is found that each village has its own dialect or speech form name after the village. The intelligibility among the village varies according to the distance between them; that is farther the village, more the unintelligibility. Though they are the dialects of Tangkhul they are mutually unintelligible to each other. Lairamlo is also one of the dialects of Tangkhul, which is spoken in the Ringpam village of Tengnoupal district of Manipur, India. The term Ringpam is a compound word ***ring*** 'alive' and ***pam*** 'land' which literally mean 'living land'. Ringpam have their heritage language and culture which have been inheriting from their forefather. However, they do not have their own script and literature, still then they had their education in English or Manipuri, the state language of Manipur. Somehow now a days, they have started using Roman script for writing their own language. The population of Lairamlo is 440 speakers respectively. The dialects belong to the Kuki-Chin-Naga sub-group of Tibeto-Burman family *(Grierson's LSI, 1903)*.

1.1. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The main objective is to describe the phonemic inventory of the dialect in terms of number of vowels, consonants and diphthongs including their distribution and description in Lairamlo.
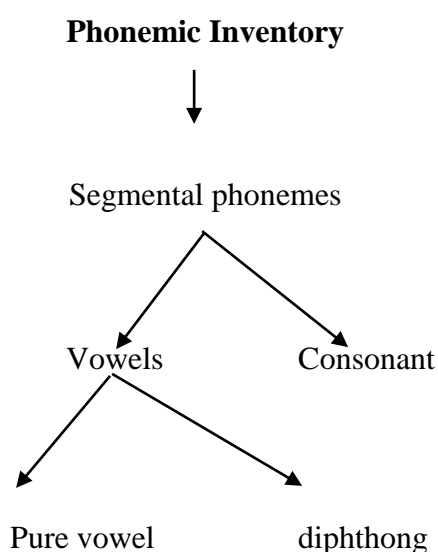
1.2. METHODOLOGY

The methodology adopted for writing this paper is descriptive and analytical in nature. The methods for collecting data for the study includes both primary and secondary sources. The primary source is mainly based on the speech of the community. The data collection was done through personal contact with informants of different sexes, professionals and age groups. The data is cross-checked with the other speakers of the same dialect for authenticity and consistency of the same. The secondary method includes the available written materials like books, journals, articles etc. For the suitability, the Ringpam village under the district of Tengnoupal in Manipur is chosen for the study area.

2. TYPOLOGICAL FEATURES OF LAIRAMLO

Typologically, the dialect is tonal and agglutinating dialect. Like many other Tibeto-Burman languages, tense is not prominent in Lairamlo. So, aspect is commonly an important representation of time in Lairamlo. Lairamlo has no grammatical gender. Gender is realized as masculine or feminine on the basis of natural sex. All the male comes under masculine and female comes under feminine. All the inanimate objects come under neuter gender. The numeral system of Lairamlo is of decimal type. Vigesimal number system is also attached in the dialect. Verb in Lairamlo is not marked for persons, numbers and genders. Like many other Tibeto-Burman languages/dialects, the dialects lacks the aspirated voiced velar stops b^h, d^h, and g^h . Lairamlo has inclusive-exclusive distinction only in the case of first-person plural pronoun /a-hǝnte/ 'we' (inclusive) vs. /i-hǝnte/ 'we' (exclusive).

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3. PHONEMIC INVENTORY

Lairamlo consists of twenty-nine/29 segmental phonemes including seven vowels and twenty-two consonants. The phonemes of the dialect are shown in the following sections:

Phonemic Inventory

↓

Segmental phonemes

Vowels   Consonant

Pure vowel   diphthong

3.1. VOWELS

Lairamlo consists of seven (7) vowel phonemes / *i, e, a, ə, o, ʉ* and *u*/. These vowels can be classified into three levels of tongue height: high, mid and low, a three-way contrast of front, central and back are also distinguished in terms of the parts of the tongue raised. The vowel phonemes in Lairamlo are shown in the following table 1:

Table 1: Vowel phonemes in Lairamlo

	Front	Central	Back
High	*i*	*ʉ*	*u*
Mid	*e*	*ə*	*o*
Low		*a*	

From the above illustration, it can be indicated that the dialect has only oral and voiced vowels; no voiceless and nasalized vowels are noticed in the dialect. Unlike many other Tibeto-Burman languages, vowel length is not a phonemic feature in the dialect.

3.2. CONSONANTS OF LAIRAMLO

Lairamlo has twenty-two (22) consonantal phonemes i.e., /*p, b, t, d, k, g, pʰ, tʰ, kʰ, č, v, s, z, ʃ, h, m, n, ŋ, l, r, w* and *y*/. According to their place of articulation consonants can be classified into bilabial, labio-dental, alveolar, post-alveolar, palatal, velar and glottal. They can be further classified into seven types: stops, nasals, fricatives, lateral, trill and approximant in terms of their manner of articulation. Lairamlo has twenty five consonant phonemes, i.e., nine stops /*p, pʰ, b, t, tʰ , d, k, kʰ , g*/, one affricate /*č*/, five fricatives /*v, s, z, ʃ, h*/, three nasals /*m, n, ŋ*/, one lateral /l/, one trill /r/ and two approximant /*w*/ and /*y*/ respectively. The inventory of consonant phonemes in Lairamlo is illustrated in Table 2

Table 2: Consonant phonemes in Lairamlo

Manner of articulation		Place of articulation														
		Bilabial		Labio-dental		Alveolar		Post-alveolar		Palatal		Velar		Glottal	
		vl	vd	vl	vd	vl	vd	vl	vd	vl	vd	vl	vd	vl	vd
Stops	Uasp.	p	b			t	d					k	g		
	Asp.	pʰ				tʰ						kʰ			
Affricates										č					
Fricatives				v		s	z	ʃ						h	
Nasals		m				n						ŋ			
Lateral							l								
Trill							r								
Approximant			w								y				

3.3. CONTRASTING PAIRS

The contrasting pairs of vowels and consonants in the dialect are described in the following segments:

3.3.1. Vowel contrasting pairs

The seven vowel phonemes of Lairamlo are established on the basis of the minimal pairs which are shown in the following examples:

/i/ vs. /e/   /si/   'bamboo'
                     /se/   'animal'

/ə/ vs. /a/   /kwəŋ/   'spring'
                     /kwaŋ/   'stream'

/u/ vs. /o/   /kʰu/   'mongoose'
                     /kʰo/   'leg'

/i/ vs. /ʉ/   /ihe/   'tooth'
                     /ʉhe/   'molar tooth'

3.3.2. CONSONANTS CONTRASTING PAIRS

The contrasting pairs of the twenty-two (22) consonantal phonemes in Lairamlo, which are established on the basis of the following minimal pairs.

Contrasting Pairs of Stops

/p/ vs. /b/   /pilo/   'give'
                       /bilo/   'sleep'

/t/ vs. /d/   /tilo/   'what'
                       /dilo/   'write'

/k/ vs. /g/   /kəpiyam/   'like'
                       /gəpiyam/   'weaving gear'

/p/ vs. /pʰ/   /polo/   'order'
                       /pʰolo/   'dry'

/t/ vs. /tʰ/   /təlo/   'hit'
                       /tʰəlo/   'sent'

/k/ vs. /kʰ/   /ko/   'head'
                       /kʰo/   'leg'

Contrasting pairs of nasals

/m/ vs. /n/   /məʃiyet/   'sun'
                       /nəʃiyet/'air'

/m/ vs. /ŋ/   /məyeklo/   'mould'
                       /ŋəyeklo/   'wait'

/ŋ/ vs. /n/   /kʰəmaŋ/   'drink'
                       /kʰəman/   'catch'

Contrasting pairs of affricate and fricatives

/č/ vs. /z/   /čəhaŋ/   'surname'
                       /zəhaŋ/   'fit'

/s/ vs. /ʃ/   /sobilo/ 'open (the door)'
                       /ʃobilo/   'pray'

/v/ vs. /s/   /kəve/   'climbs'
                       /kəse/   'heat'

/s/ vs. /h/   /kəso/   'open'
                       /kəho/   'invite'

/s/ vs. /z/   /selo/   'sing'
                       /zelo/   'eat'

Contrasting pairs of laterals, trill and approximant

/l/ vs. /r/	/limlo/	'to pinch'
	/rimlo/	'to draw a line'
/w/ vs. /y/	/wetumpʰe/	'will go'
	/yetumpʰe/	'ok'

3.4. Distribution and description of phonemes

The distribution of vowels and consonants found in Lairamo are illustrated below:

3.4.1. Vowels

Lairamlo has seven vowel phonemes and all vowels can occur in all three positions in different syllabic structures. In other words, all the vowels can occur in word initially, medially and finally. The distribution of vowel phonemes in the dialect is illustrated below:

3.4.1.1. Front Vowels

Close front high unrounded vowel /i/ and close front mid unrounded vowel /e/ can occurs in all position of words i.e., initial, medial and final as shown in below:

Occurrence of /i/

Initial		Medial		Final	
/intʉ/	'water'	/čini/	'day'	/uči/	'parrot'
/ikʰu/	'cave'	/zimit/	'sun.	/ani/	'mother-in-law'

Occurrence of /e/

Initial		Medial		Final	
/eto/	'there'	/met/	bedbug'	/se/	'animal'
/esindo/	'to them'	/ketʰi/	'death'	/inuŋipe/	'parents'

3.4.1.2. Central Vowel

Close central unrounded /ʉ/, mid central unrounded /ə/ and open central unrounded /a/ vowels can occur in all three positions: initial, medial and final position of words.

Occurrence of /ʉ/

Initial		Medial		Final	
/ʉ/	'dog'	/pʉmənuŋ/	'widow'	/intʉ/	'water'
/ʉhe/	'molar tooth'	/kʰʉmi/	'guest'	/seipʉ/	'cow'

Occurrence of /ə/

Initial		Medial		Final	
/əŋku/	'baby'	/məyoŋ/	'monkey'	/vikəpə/	'twin'
/əmei/	'meat'	/təmin/	'cat'	/mə/	'fire'

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Occurrence of /a/

Initial	Medial	Final
/ama/ 'brother'	/hasəmei/ 'yawn'	/hurra/ 'saw'
/ani/ 'mother-in-law'	/kʰwaŋ/ 'plate (metal)'	/tʰa/ 'fruit'

3.4.1.3. Back Vowel

Close back rounded /u/ and mid back rounded /o/ vowels can occur in all three positions of word. The distribution of the vowels /u/ and /o/ is illustrated in the following examples:

Occurrence of /u/

Initial	Medial	Final
/ukʰi/ 'crow'	/pupei/ 'friend'	/məyu/'mouse'
/uči/ 'parrot'	/kəsuntʰa/ 'garlic'	/mikʰu/ 'nose'

Occurrence of /o/

Initial	Medial	Final
/opre/ 'cock'	/ipʰoŋ/ 'plant'	/ló/ 'field'
/odoŋ/ 'peacock'	/kəhoŋ/ 'neck'	/ino/ 'young man'

3.4. 2. Consonants

All consonant phonemes in the dialect cannot occur in all three positions: initial, medial and final. Out of the twenty-two consonants, the voiceless un-aspirated stops /p/ /t/ and /k/ and nasals /m/ /n/ /ŋ/ can occur in all three positions. However, /b, d, pʰ, kʰ, tʰ, g, č, v, s, z, ʃ, h, l, r, w and y/ can occur only in word initial and medial position. The distributions of consonantal phonemes in Lairamlo are shown below:

3.4.2.1. Stops

There are nine stops in the dialect i.e., /p, b, t, d, k, g, pʰ, tʰ and h/. According to their place of articulation stop consonants can be categorized into three classifications: bilabial /p, pʰ, b/, alveolar /t, tʰ , d/ and velar /k, kʰ , g/. In the dialect, all the stop sounds cannot occur in the three positions of words i.e., initial, medial and final. Out of the nine (9) stops consonants, the voiceless un-aspirated stops /p/ /t/ and /k/ can distribute in all three positions of words.

Occurrence of /p/

Initial	Medial	Final
/puksi/ 'grass'	/opiyu/ 'hen'	/kəhip/ 'heavy'
/pəyoŋ/ 'gun'	/əpotʰa/ 'pomegranate'	/simtip/ 'gable'

Occurrence of /pʰ/

Initial	Medial	Final
/pʰiyəm/'ice'	/kəpʰoŋ/'wave'	--------
/pʰəlei/ 'stomach'	/čəmpʰrik/ 'lightning'	-------

Occurrence of /b/

Initial	Medial	Final
/biyaŋtʰa/ 'elbow'	/kumbi/ 'earthquake'	-------
/baŋ/ 'basket'	/tʰube/ 'whom'	-------

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Occurrence of /t/

Initial	Medial		Final	
/təŋkoŋ/ 'crocodile'	/*kunte*/	'stream'	/məʃiyet/	'air'
/tumin/ 'cat'	/kwaŋte/	'brook'	/zimit/	'sun'

Occurrence of /tʰ/

Initial	Medial	Final
/tʰiŋ/ 'tree'	/motʰa/ 'banana'	------
/tʰa/ 'fruit'	/sitʰa/ 'chilly'	------

Occurrence of /d/

Initial	Medial	Final
/denke/ 'be climb'	/həndon/ 'step'	-----
/deŋ/ 'be throw'	/adobe/ 'brother(y)'	-----

Occurrence of /k/

Initial	Medial	Final	
/kəsik/ 'weather'	/həŋko/ 'cold'	/čəmpʰrik/	'lightening'
/kəhui/ 'shade'	/siko/ 'nine'	/ihuk/	'lid'

Occurrence of /kʰ/

Initial	Medial	Final
/kʰəmu/ 'blow'	/ikʰut/ 'stream	------
/kʰəmu/ 'blow'	/məkʰut/ 'smoke'	------

Occurrence of /g/

Initial	Medial	Final
/gəpiyam/ 'weaving gear'	/pʰriŋetʰa/ 'passion fruit'	-----

3.4.2.2. Affricates

In the dialect there is one fricative phoneme i.e., /č/. The phoneme /č/ is the voiceless palatal affricate. It occurs in initial and medial positions of words. In Lairamlo, the palatal affricate /č/ never shown in the final position of word as illustrated in the following examples.

Occurrence of /č/

Initial	Medial	Final
/čini/ 'day'	/ičiye/ 'quarter'	------
/čiyak/ 'rice (cook)'	/kəčo/ 'dig'	------

3.4.2.3. Fricatives

In the dialect, there are five fricative phonemes i.e., /v, s, z, ʃ and h/. According to their place of articulation stop consonants can be categorized into three classifications: labio-dental /v/, alveolar /s, z/ and post-alveolar /ʃ, h /. All the fricative sounds can occur only in the initial and medial positions of words.

Occurrence of /v/

Initial	Medial	Final
/vikəpə/ 'twin'	/keve/ 'climb'	-----
/vekəde/ 'arrive'	/heve/ 'this'	-----

Occurrence of /s/

Initial	Medial	Final
/sima/ 'gold'	/kəsiye/ 'old'	-----
/səlutʰa/ 'amla'	/kunset/ 'thorn'	-----

Occurrence of /z/

Initial	Medial	Final
/zimit/ 'sun'	/kəziŋ/ 'weather'	-----
/ziŋtʉ/ 'rain'	/həziyaŋ/ 'mosquito'	-----

Occurrence of /ʃ/

Initial	Medial	Final
/ʃei/ 'cow'	/kəʃiŋ/ 'raw'	-----
/ʃim/ 'house'	/məʃiyet/ 'sun'	------

Occurrence of /h/

Initial	Medial	Final
/həmələ/ 'vomiting'	/čəŋhun/ 'dust'	-----
/hiyu/ 'rope'	/kəhiye/ 'bright'	------

3.4.2.4. Nasal

In Lairamlo, there are three nasal phonemes. In their place of articulation, it can be categorizing into three i.e., voiced bilabial nasal /m/, voiced alveolar nasal /n/ and voiced velar nasal /ŋ/. All the nasal phonemes can occur in all position of words.

Occurrence of /m/

Initial	Medial	Final
/mulle/ 'arrow'	/kʰəmin/ 'ripe'	/ziŋkum/ 'year'
/məluŋ/ 'heart/	/kʰəmen/ 'false'	/kədom/ 'shout'

Occurrence of /n/

Initial	Medial	Final
/nəhe/ 'axe'	/anuŋ/ 'mother'	/kəkən/ 'rock'
/nikʰu/ 'nose'	/kʰəne/ 'ears'	/kʰunan/ 'stool'

Occurrence of /ŋ/

Initial	Medial	Final
/ŋəhei/ 'night'	/kʰəŋo/ 'white'	/mitʰiŋ/ 'firewood'
/ŋəlape/ 'clay'	/siŋŋe/ 'fish'	/kəčiyaŋ/ 'month'

3.4.2.5. Lateral

The consonant phoneme /l/ is the voiced alveolar lateral. It occurs only in the initial and medial positions of words and it never occur in the word final as shown in the following example.

Occurrence of /l/

Initial	Medial	Final
/ləmtuk/ 'spade'	/məlei/ 'tongue'	-----
/ləti/ 'fog'	/pəlule/ 'snail'	-----

3.4.2.6. Trill

The consonant phoneme /r/ is the voiced alveolar trill. It occurs in all initial, medial and final positions of words and it never occur in the word final position.

Occurrence of /r/

Initial	Medial	Final
/reimi/ 'soldier'	/məri/ 'iron'	-----
/rəsuŋ/ 'noon'	/kʰəri/ 'intensive'	-----

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3.4.2.7. Approximants

In Lairamlo, there are two approximants phoneme. In their place of articulation, it can be categorizing into two i.e., voiced bilabial approximant /*w*/ and voiced palatal approximant /*y*/. The two phonemes cannot occur in all position of words.

Occurrence of /*w*/

Initial	Medial	Final
/*waŋlo*/ 'come'	/*kʰuwatʰa*/ 'bean'	-----
/*wohəm*/ 'with'	/*sipowaŋ*/ 'shoulder'	-----

Occurrence of /*y*/

Initial	Medial	Final
/*yotume*/ 'to sell'	/*pəyoŋ*/ 'gun'	------
/*yo*/ 'sheep'	/*kʰiye*/ 'moth'	------

4. CONCLUSION

Lairamlo is a dialect of Tangkhul, spoken in the Ringpam village of Tengnoupal district of Manipur, India. The dialect has six vowel phonemes /*i, e, a, ə, o, u, ʉ*/. In the dialect all the vowels are voiced and oral. The vowel lengths are not phonemic in the dialects. Lairamlo has few numbers of a consonant cluster. Some vowel sequence is also found in the dialect. Lairamlo has twenty-two (22) consonantal phonemes i.e., /*p, b, t, d, k, g, pʰ, tʰ, kʰ, č, v, s, z, ʃ, h, m, n, ŋ, l, r, w* and *y*/. Aspiration is phonemic and voicing is one of the distinctive features of consonantal phonemes in the dialects.

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