

SYLLABLE STRUCTURE IN BISHNUPRIYA MANIPURI

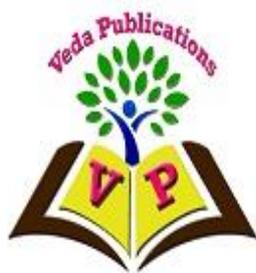
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DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.54513/JOELL.2022.9109>

ABSTRACT



The key purpose of this paper is to investigate the phonological aspect of syllable structure in Bishnupriya Manipuri. The language is spoken in the North-East Indian states of Assam, Tripura, Manipur, and Meghalaya, as well as in the neighbouring country Bangladesh. It is a member of the Eastern form of Indo-Aryan language family. According to India's 2011 census report, the total population of Bishnupriya speakers is 79,646. The research area focuses on Bishnupriya speakers in the state of Assam. When it comes to nomenclature, the language is surrounded by a lot of controversy.

Some people refer to it as Bishnupuriya, while others refer to it as Bishnupriya Manipuri or just Bishnupriya. The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) recently published a list of endangered languages, and Bishnupriya is listed as vulnerable on that list.

The language doesn't have a script of its own, so it uses the Bengali script. Bishnupriya's syllabic structure is V, VV, VC, VCV, VVC, CVC, CV, CVV, and so on. The different types of Bishnupriya syllables are: (i) Mono-Syllabic, (ii) Di-Syllabic, (iii) Tri-Syllabic, (iv) Tetra-Syllabic, (v) Penta-Syllabic and (vi) Hexa-Syllabic.

Keywords: *Bishnupriya Manipuri, Indo-Aryan, Syllable Structure.*



1. INTRODUCTION

Bishnupriya Manipuri, Bishnupriya or Bishnupuriya is the name of the language spoken by the people. Bishnupriya Manipuri, this language has developed from the Eastern form of Indo-Aryan language family. The Bishnupriya language is developed under Magadhi-Apabhramsa. It bears sisterly relation with Assamese, Bengali and Oriya. Accordingly, this language is quite distinct from Meitei (Manipuri) which belongs to the Tibeto-Burman group of languages. The language is spoken mainly by the people living in parts of Assam, Tripura, Manipur, Meghalaya and Bangladesh. The speakers of the language are scattered all over North East India mostly populated in Cachar, Karimganj and Hailakandi district of Assam, North-East India. The language is surrounded by a lot of controversy as far as the nomenclature is concerned. According to the report of Census of India 2011 the population of Bishnupriya speakers is 79,646. In the Census of 1981, the figures of Bishnupriya speakers were not included due to the pending decision on nomenclature Bishnupuriya/Bishnupriya Manipuri. 'Bishnupriya' is a contracted form of the term 'Bishnupuriya' (K.P.Sinha, 1981). The earliest description of Bishnupriya is found in Grierson (1903). Grierson has placed this language as "Mayang or Bishunpuriya" in Linguistic Survey of India. Vol-V, P.426, 1903. After Grierson, there has been some notable works by Sinha (1968, 1981, 1986). These works include Sinha's own dissertation (1961), a

grammar (1981) and an Etymological Dictionary (1986).

1.1. Data and Methodology

The data for the present paper were collected mainly through the Primary method. Personal interview were conducted in the three districts of Assam, over a period of time where Bishnupriya speakers are available and cross checked with other native speakers in order to find out its authenticity. Even through the author of this paper herself is a native speaker. Apart from these, the secondary sources of data were collected, through different books, journals, various online articles and study materials.

1.2. Objective of the study

The main focus of this paper is to find out the phonological aspect of syllable structure and its types in the Bishnupriya language which is spoken mainly in the three districts (Cachar, Karimganj, and Hailakandi) of Assam.

2. Typological features of Bishnupriya

- a) Like most of the non-tonal Indo-Aryan languages, Bishnupriya is a non-tonal language.
- b) The basic structure of syllable in Bishnupriya is CVC.
- c) Like other Indo-Aryan languages, Bishnupriya roots are generally monosyllabic in nature.
- d) Bishnupriya language follows the SOV word order.

e) The verbs in Bishnupriya show number, person and gender agreements.

f) The numeral generally precedes the noun in Bishnupriya, but it may also follow the noun.

3. Syllable Structure

According to David Crystal, 'syllable is a unit of pronunciation typically larger than a single sound and smaller than a word'. Kenstowicz (1994) explains the syllable is a very important concept for understanding the phonological structure. It is made up of one or more than one phoneme. The vowel syllable is essential to the structure of a syllable i.e., a syllable is not possible without the vowel phoneme. The vowel is obviously the obligatory element in a syllable and is called the 'nucleus' or 'peak' of the syllable. On the other hand, the consonant which begins a syllable is called the 'onset' and that which occurs at the end of a syllable is called the 'coda' of the respective syllables. Fig-1 shows the syllable structure.

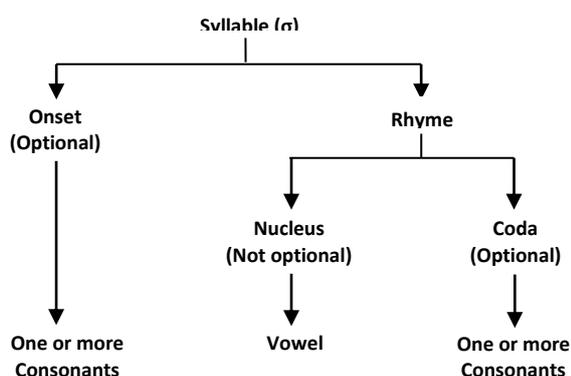


Fig-1: Syllable Structure

Yule (2004) describes the syllable structure as follows:

A syllable must contain a vowel (or vowel like) sound. The most common type of syllable in language also has a consonant before the vowel,

represented as a CV. The syllable like *me*, *to* or *no* have an onset and a nucleus, but no coda. They are known as 'open' syllables. When a coda is present, as in the syllables *up*, *cup*, *at* or *hat*, they are called 'closed' syllables. The basic structure of the kind of syllable found in English words like *green* (CCVC), *eggs* (VCC), *ham* (CVC), *I* (V), *do* (CV), *not* (CVC), *like* (CVC), *them* (CVC), *SAM* (CVC), *I* (V), *am* (VC).

3.1. Open Syllables and Closed Syllables

Syllables are classified into open and closed on the basis of the absence of coda. When a coda is absent in a syllable, it is called 'open' syllable and when a coda is present in a syllable, it is called 'closed' syllable.

3.2. Syllable Structure of Bishnupriya:

There are six types of syllables found in the language. They are monosyllabic, disyllabic, trisyllabic, tetrasyllabic, pentasyllabic and hexasyllabic. Bishnupriya syllables consist of a nucleus and the nucleus may be a vowel or a diphthong. However, all vowels in Bishnupriya make the nucleus of the syllable i.e. there is no non syllabic vowel in this language. It is also observed that hexa-syllabic words are very rare/less in comparison with the other syllable types. Though, there is no closed hexa-syllabic words found in the language. All the different types of syllables have been mentioned below –

3.2.1. Mono-Syllabic Words:

A word containing a single syllable is called a monosyllable (David Crystal, A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics). Like other Indo-Aryan



languages, Bishnupriya roots are generally monosyllabic. There are some examples of monosyllabic words found in the language which is given below. Here the symbols V represent vowel, C represents consonant, VV represents diphthongs and CC represents clusters respectively. Examples are given below:

Open Syllable –

Syllable Structure	Lexeme	Gloss
V	/ε/	'yes'
VV	/ai/	'come'
CV	/mi/	'me'
CVV	/bou/	'wind'

Closed Syllable –

Syllable Structure	Lexeme	Gloss
VC	/ur/	'fly'
VVC	/oil/	'ok'
CVC	/kan/	'ear'

3.2.2. Disyllabic Words:

A disyllable or disyllabic word consists of two syllables.

Open Syllable - let us first go through the examples of syllables where second syllable is open.

Syllable Structure	Lexeme	Gloss
V.CV	/ε.ra/	'peel'
VC.CV	/ɔŋ.kɔ/	'mathematics'
VVC.CV	/oil.ga/	'enough'
CV.CV	/či.ni/	'sugar'
CV.CVV	/ʈa.rou/	'ladle'
CVV.CV	/kou.li/	'quarrel'
CVC.CV	/beŋ.ki/	'husk (dhenki)'
CVC.CVV	/maʈ.nei/	'dumb'
CVC.CCV	/mon.ʈri/	'minister'

Closed Syllable - here, the second syllable is closed

Syllable Structure	Lexeme	Gloss
V.CVC	/u.rɔʈ/	'thigh'
CV.CVC	/kʰɔ.bol/	'papaya'
CV.CVVC	/sa.ʈoil/	'flourish'
CVV.CVC	/boi.čal/	'earthquake'
CVC.CVC	/čor.kɔr/	'steal'

3.2.3. Tri-Syllabic Words:

Tri-syllable is a word that has three syllables in it. The examples are given below:

Open Syllable - here, the third syllable is open.

Syllable Structure	Lexeme	Gloss
V.CV.CV	/a.ŋu.li/	'finger'
V.CVC.CV	/a.ʈol.pa/	'low caste'
CV.CV.CV	/ko.ho.ni/	'elbow'
CV.CVC.CV	/mo.rɔk.si/	'chilli'
CV.CV.CVV	/pi.ʈa.rei/	'cooper'
CVV.CV.CV	/gau.ra.pa/	'young man'
CVV.CVC.CV	/nou.kal.pi/	'midwife'
CVC.CV.CV	/pin.pi.ni/	'drizzling'
CCV.CV.CV	/pri.tʰi.bi/	'earth'

Closed Syllable - here, the third syllable is closed.

Syllable Structure	Lexeme	Gloss
V.CV.CVC	/ε.na.mel/	'aluminium'
VC.CV.CVC	/un.čɔ.lis/	'thirty nine'
CV.CV.CVC	/po.ŋi.ʈol/	'guava'
CV.CVC.CVC	/ʃu.gir.bat/	'corn'
CVV.CV.CVC	/hou.ri.yɔk/	'mother-in-law'
CVV.CVC.CVC	/noi.rit.kun/	'south west'
CVC.CVC.CVC	/mon.gol.bar/	'tuesday'
CVC.CV.CVC	/pʰen.ɔ.nuk/	'rainbow'

**3.2.4. Tetra-Syllabic Words:**

Words having four syllables are known as tetra-syllables. The examples are given below:

Open Syllable - here, the fourth syllable is open.

Syllable Structure	Lexeme	Gloss
V.CV.CV.CV	/i.ku.ʈa.ni/	'hiccups'
VC.CV.CV.CV	/el.ko.ra.ni/	'fasting'
CV.CV.V.CV	/su.di.a.la/	'moneylender'
CV.CV.CV.CV	/se.na.ka.ʈa/	'porcupine'
CV.CV.CV.CṾ	/ka.la.ʈe.rou/	'bulbul'
CV.CV.CṾ.CV	/si.ka.ʈei.ni/	'grasshopper'
CV.CV.CVC.CṾ	/ka.la.ʈiŋ.kʰei/	'time before dawn'
CV.CVC.CV.CV	/ba.ʈor.ba.ra/	'right side'
CV.CVC.V.CV	/ga.riʈ.o.na/	'pregnant'
CṾ.CVC.CV.CV	/ḍou.jil.ka.ni/	'lightening'
CVC.CV.CV.CV	/ruk.kʰu.ʈu.ni/	'woodpecker'
CCV.CV.CV.CV	/pro.ʈa.po.ʈi/	'butterfly'
CVC.CVC.V.CV	/sel.kom.a.la/	'milkman'
CVC.CV.CVC.CV	/gur.mo.rɔk.si/	'pepper'
CVC.CCV.CV.CV	/suʈ.ʈro.da.ri/	'singer (rass)'
CVC.CVC.CVC.CV	/ʈaŋ.gol.baʈ.ʈi/	'gillidanda'

Closed Syllable - here, the fourth syllable is closed.

Syllable Structure	Lexeme	Gloss
CV.CV.CV.CVC	/ma.na.po.rom/	'lizard'
CV.CCV.CVC.CVC	/sur.ʈɔ.grɔ.hon/	'solar eclipse'
CVC.CCV.CCV.CVC	/ʈon.ʈrɔ.grɔ.hon/	'lunar eclipse'

3.2.5. Penta-Syllabic Words:

Words having five syllables are known as penta-syllables. The examples are given below:

Open Syllable - here, the fifth syllable is open.

Syllable Structure	Lexeme	Gloss
V.CV.CV.CV.CV	/a.ʈʰa.li.ma.ʈi/	'clay'
CV.CV.CV.CVC.CV	/ka.ʈa.mo.rɔk.si/	'green chilli'
CV.CVC.CV.CV.CV	/kʰe.ror.sa.ʈa.ra/	'mushroom'
CVC.CV.CV.CV.CV	/ḍin.gu.ju.ra.ni/	'thundering'
CV.CV.CV.CV.CV	/ko.la.pa.ka.na/	'half-ripe'

Closed Syllable - here, the fifth syllable is closed.

Syllable Structure	Lexeme	Gloss
CṾ.CV.CṾ.CV.CVC	/boi.ʈo.hou.ri.yɔk/	'husband's elder sister'
CCV.CVC.CV.CV.CVC	/bri.hos.po.ʈi.bar/	'thursday'

3.2.6. Hexa-Syllabic Words:

A word comprising six syllables is known as hexa-syllabic words. The examples are given below:

Open Syllable - here, the sixth syllable is open.

Syllable Structure	Lexeme	Gloss
CV.CV.CV.CV.CVC.CV	/hu.ka.na.mo.rɔk.si/	'dry chilli'

CONCLUSION

On the basis of the above analysis the following conclusions can be drawn that, Bishnupriya Manipuri is an Indo-Aryan language which has developed from the Eastern form of Indo-Aryan language family. But, this language is quite distinct from Meitei (Manipuri) which belongs to the Tibeto-Burman group of languages. The Bishnupriya syllable structure consists of onset, nucleus and coda. Its roots are generally of monosyllabic type. The syllable carries vowel as a nucleus while consonants do not make syllables. A vowel alone can stand as a syllable, while consonants can optionally have an onset. It is also observed that the open syllables of monosyllabic words are less in comparison to closed syllables of the monosyllabic words. It is also observed that the disyllabic, trisyllabic and tetrasyllabic words are frequently found in the language. The most common syllable pattern in Bishnupriya is CVC. The Bishnupriya language can construct words up to hexa-syllable. Of course, the hexa-syllabic words are very few compared to other syllabic words. It is very rare to get pure word in hexa-syllabic word construction. These words are mainly compound words. And even there are no closed hexa-syllabic words in the language.

Abbreviations

V	Vowel
C	Consonant
CC	Cluster



VV Diphthong

SOV Subject Object Verb

Phonology, 95-110p., Conferences and Seminars Series-6, CIIL Mysore.

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