



RESEARCH ARTICLE



SEGMENTAL PHONOLOGY OF KAIPENG

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ABSTRACT



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This paper aims to present the segmental phonology of Kaipeng, an endangered language spoken in the two North-Eastern states namely, Tripura and Mizoram. The total number of Kaipeng speakers in Tripura is approximately 15000. The term Kaipeng is used to represent both the language and the people. The word 'Kaipeng' is derived from two words: *kai* meaning 'to lead' and *peng* meaning 'another way or path'. Thus, Kaipeng literally means leading someone towards another path. Linguistically, Kaipeng belongs to the Kuki-Chin sub-group of the Tibeto Burman language family. It has close affinities with other Kuki-Chin languages like Hrangkhoh, Ranglong, Biate, Thadou, Chiru etc. The present work presents the segmental phonology including vowels, consonants, diphthongs and syllable structure of Kaipeng. This paper will mainly focus on the Kaipeng spoken in the state of Tripura. Thus, this paper attempts to highlight the findings and analysis of the data collected based on the fieldwork carried out in Teliamura village, Khowai, district of Tripura.

Keywords: *Kaipeng, Tibeto-Burman, Kuki-Chin, Segmental Phonology*

1. INTRODUCTION

Kaipeng is spoken in the two North-Eastern states namely, Tripura and Mizoram. The term Kaipeng is used to represent both the language and the people. The word 'Kaipeng' is derived from two words *kai* meaning 'to lead' and *peng* meaning 'another way or path'. Thus, Kaipeng literally means leading someone towards another path. Linguistically, Kaipeng belongs to the Tibeto Burman language family under the Kuki-Chin sub-group. It has a close affinity with other Kuki-Chin languages like Hrangkhoh, Ranglong, Biate, Thadao, Chiru etc. Kaipeng is a subgroup of the Halam community of the North Eastern state Tripura. Halams are also referred to as "Mila Kukis." Within Halam, there are twelve sub-groups: Molsom, Kaipeng, Hrangkhawl, Kalai, Rupini, Bongcher, Karbong, Langkai, Chorai, Morsophang, Ranglong, and Thangachep. According to the 2011 Census, there are 57,210 members of the Halam family. The Kaipengs being an indigenous tribe of North East India have their own language, culture, customs, legends, folksongs, folklore, folktales, and religious beliefs. According to their oral tradition, they refer to themselves as *riam* 'people' *miriam* 'men' *manmasu* 'human being'.

1.1. Geographical Distribution

Kaipengs are settled in two North-Eastern states of India namely Tripura and Mizoram. The census of India does not include Kaipeng in the list. According to one of their community leaders, there are approximately 15,000 Kaipeng speakers in Tripura. There are a total number of 50 Kaipeng villages in Tripura. Among them, 35 villages are under Ampa Block, Amarpur in Gomati district, 4 in Teliamura in Khowai district, 1 in Damcherra, Panisagar in North Tripura and 10 villages are in Jampuijala in Sepahijala. There are also 5 Kaipeng villages in the state of Mizoram under the Mamit and Aizawl districts.¹

Maps showing the districts in which the language is spoken is given in figure 1 and 2.

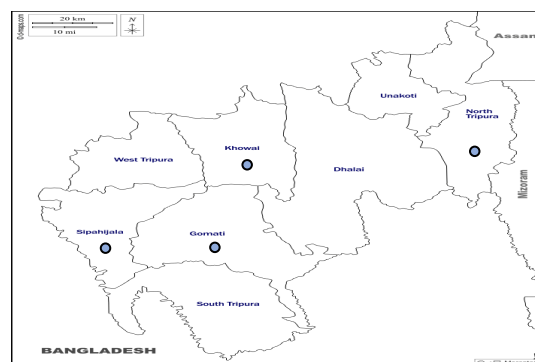


Figure 1: Map of Tripura²



Figure 2: Map of Mizoram³

1.2. Language classification

Halam was categorised under the Old-Kuki group by Grierson (1904). It is important to note here that Kaipeng comes under the Halam group. Figure 3 below shows the sub-grouping of Halam under the Kuki-Chin languages by Grierson (1904).

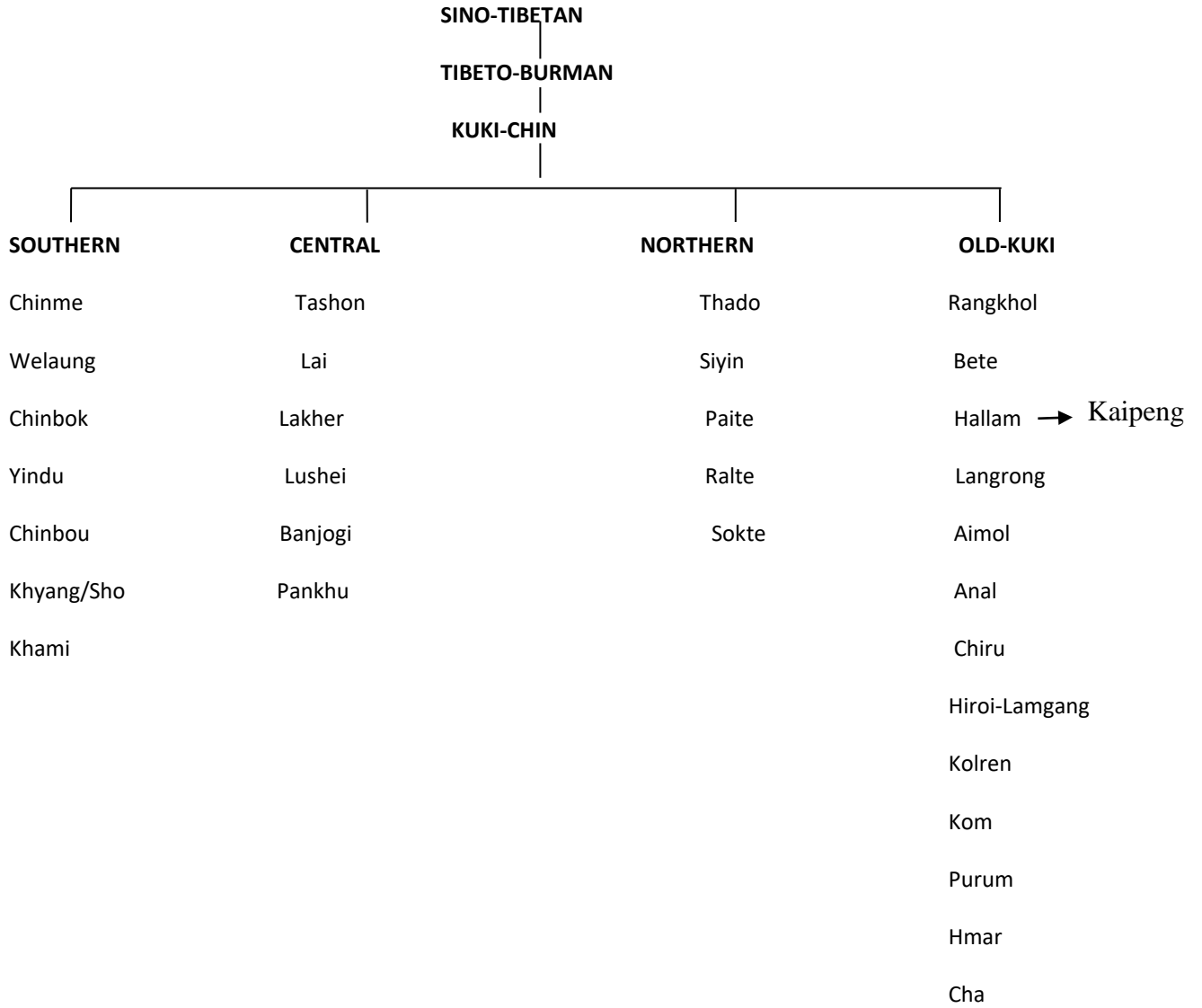
¹ Data collected from the field visit and interaction with the respondents

² <https://d-maps.com> Accessed on 4th May 2023

³ www.shutterstock.com Accessed on 4th May 2023



Figure 3: Grierson's classification of Kuki-Chin languages (1904)⁴



⁴ Grierson, G. A 1904 'Linguistic Survey of India (vol. III Part III)



Grierson sub grouped Hallam along with other similar languages under the Old-Kuki group of Kuki-Chin family in the Linguistic survey of India where he classified many languages under different families.

2. DATA AND METHODOLOGY

The present study is based on both primary data collection and secondary resources. Primary data is collected from Krishnahowpara village, Teliamura under Khowai district of Tripura from the native speakers of the language with the help of the linguistic fieldwork methodology. The questionnaire is based on Anvita Abbi's A Manual of Linguistic Field

Table 1: Vowel chart of Kaipeng

	FRONT	CENTRAL	BACK
Close	i		u
Close-mid	e		
Open-mid		ə	ɔ
Open	a		

3.1.1. Contrastive Pairs for Vowels

i ~ a

t^hi 'blood'

t^ha 'month'

a ~ ə

lam 'dance'

ləm 'way'

e ~ u

rei 'axe'

rui 'rope'

e ~ a

sei 'arrow'

sai 'rice'

u ~ ɔ

tsum 'down'

tsɔm 'sponsor'

ə ~ ɔ

ləm 'way'

lɔm 'happy'

Work and Indian Languages and SPPEL Language Documentation Handbook word list. Additionally, for the secondary sources, data is collected from books, journals, articles, doctoral thesis, Internet sources etc.

3. Segmental phonology

This section presents the segmental phonology of Kaipeng. Based on the analysis of the present data, there are 19 consonants, 6 vowels and 6 diphthongs in Kaipeng.

3.1. Vowels

Kaipeng has six vowels: *i, e, a, ə, ɔ* and *u*. They occur in all the three positions: initial, medial and final. Table 1 shows the vowels of Kaipeng.

**3.1.2. Description of Kaipeng vowels**

/i/ is the close front vowel. It occurs in initial, medial and final positions.

Initial	Medial	Final
<i>In</i> 'house'	<i>t^hir</i> 'iron'	<i>ni</i> 'day'
<i>inkət</i> 'door'	<i>riki</i> 'horn'	<i>saipui</i> 'elephant'

/e/ is the close-mid front vowel and it occurs in the initial and medial position but not in the final position.

Initial	Medial	Final
<i>el</i> 'light'	<i>hei</i> 'pleasure'	- -
<i>ek</i> 'stool'	<i>nel</i> 'hatred'	- -

/a/ is the open front vowel in Kaipeng. It occurs in all the three positions.

Initial	Medial	Final
<i>ar</i> 'hen'	<i>mar</i> 'fat'	<i>k^ha</i> 'bitter'
<i>artsa</i> 'wild fowl'	<i>sam</i> 'hair'	<i>la</i> 'spleen'

/ə/ is the open-mid central vowel. It occurs only in the initial and medial position.

Initial	Medial	Final
<i>ətɕi</i> 'short'	<i>səkɔr</i> 'horse'	- -
<i>əsen</i> 'red'	<i>vəsu</i> 'dove'	- -

/u/ is the close back vowel and it occurs in the initial, medial and final position.

Initial	Medial	Final
<i>uite</i> 'puppy'	<i>k^hur</i> 'fever'	<i>kuru</i> 'sugarcane'
<i>urum</i> 'puffed rice'	<i>zun</i> 'urine'	<i>pu</i> 'grandfather'

/ɔ/ is the open-mid back vowel and it occurs in all the three positions.

Initial	Medial	Final
<i>ɔra</i> 'basket'	<i>vɔk</i> 'pig'	<i>əŋɔ</i> 'white'
<i>ɔle</i> 'crocodile'	<i>lukɔm</i> 'turban'	<i>kuardɔ</i> 'earring'



3.2. Diphthongs

A diphthong is a sound that is created when two vowels are combined, particularly when one vowel sound occurs first and then another. There are six diphthongs in Kaipeng: *ia, ai, ei, ui, au* and *ua*. The diphthongs in Kaipeng are presented in table 2.

Table 2: Diphthongs in Kaipeng

	i	e	a	ə	ɔ	u
i	-	-	ia	-	-	-
e	ei	-	-	-	-	-
a	ai	-	-	-	-	au
ə	-	-	-	-	-	-
ɔ	-	-	-	-	-	-
u	ui	-	ua	-	-	-

3.2.1. Contrastive pairs for diphthongs

ei ~ ui

rei 'axe' *ru* 'rope'

ai ~ ei

lai 'navel' *lei* 'tongue'

au ~ ui

lau 'startle' *lui* 'old'

ei ~ ui

nei 'possession' *nui* 'laugh'

au ~ ua

k^hau 'grasshopper' *k^hua* 'village'

3.2.2. Description of Kaipeng diphthongs

/ia/

ia is a diphthong which is produced from the close front */i/* to the open front *a*. It occurs in the medial and final position but not in the initial position.



Initial	Medial	Final
- -	<i>rial</i> 'hailstones'	<i>melsia</i> 'ugly'
- -	<i>kiak</i> 'break'	<i>ruzuksia</i> 'illusion'

/ai/

/ai/ is produced from the open front *a* to the close front */i/*. It occurs in all the three positions: initial, medial and final.

Initial	Medial	Final
<i>aitaŋ</i> 'elephant-apple'	<i>tailam</i> 'window'	<i>ratlai</i> 'youngman'
<i>ai</i> 'crab'	<i>nilaini</i> 'wednesday'	<i>sump^hai</i> 'cloud'

/ei/

/ei/ is the diphthong which starts from the close-mid front */e/* to the close front */i/*. It does not occur in the initial position but occurs in the medial and final position.

Initial	Medial	Final
- -	<i>t^heivaŋ</i> 'wood-ant'	<i>Zun</i> 'urine'
- -	<i>t^heilei</i> 'squirrel'	<i>numei</i> 'widow'

/ui/

/ui/ is produced from the close back */u/* to the close front */i/*. It occurs in the initial, medial and final position.

Initial	Medial	Final
<i>uitsɔk</i> 'frog'	<i>puiŋak</i> 'aunt'	<i>ru</i> 'rope'
<i>ui</i> 'dog'	<i>tuikɔk</i> 'water pot'	<i>vartui</i> 'vein'

/au/

/au/ begins from the open front vowel */a/* to the close back vowel */u/*. It occurs in the medial and final position but not in the initial position.



Initial	Medial	Final
- -	<i>baurəsuk</i> 'gargle'	<i>taitau</i> 'hog plum'
- -	<i>naunu</i> 'younger sister'	<i>mantau</i> 'brinjal'

/ua/

/ua/ is produced from the close back vowel *u* to the open front vowel /a/. It occurs only in the medial and final position.

Initial	Medial	Final
- -	<i>luak</i> 'vomiting'	<i>rik^hua</i> 'disease'
- -	<i>rua</i> 'rain'	<i>k^hua</i> 'village'

3.3. Consonants

Consonants are produced by means of an obstruction in the mouth or by narrowing of the air passage. There are 19 consonantal phonemes in Kaipeng: *p, b, t, d, k, g, p^h, t^h, k^h, ts, m, n, ŋ, r, v, s, z, h, l*. They are articulated by six places of articulation which include: bilabial, labiodental, alveolar, velar and glottal and seven manners of articulation: plosives, affricate, nasal, trill, fricative and lateral. Table 3 presents the consonantal phonemes of Kaipeng.

Table 3: Consonantal phonemes of Kaipeng

	Bilabial	Labiodental	Alveolar	Velar	Glottal
Plosives	<i>p b</i>		<i>t d</i>	<i>k g</i>	
	<i>p^h</i>		<i>t^h</i>	<i>k^h</i>	
Affricate			<i>ts</i>		
Nasal	<i>m</i>		<i>n</i>	<i>ŋ</i>	
Trill			<i>r</i>		
Fricative		<i>v</i>	<i>s z</i>		<i>h</i>
Lateral			<i>l</i>		

As shown in table 3, on the basis of the manner of articulation there are 9 stops *p, b, t, d, k, g, p^h, t^h, k^h*, 1 affricate *ts*, 3 nasals *m, n, ŋ*, 1 trill *r*, 4 fricatives *v, s, z, h* and 1 lateral *l*.

**3.3.1. Contrastive pair for Consonants**

The minimal pairs for the consonants in Kaipeng are given in the following section.

$p \sim b$

pu 'grandfather'

bu 'cooked rice'

$b \sim d$

bai 'pea'

dai 'cold'

$p^h \sim t^h$

p^har 'leprosy'

t^har 'new'

$k \sim k^h$

ka 'mine'

k^ha 'bitter'

$\text{ʈ} \sim s$

tsum 'down'

sum 'money'

$m \sim n$

mel 'face'

nel 'hatred'

$n \sim \eta$

na 'pain'

\eta a 'fish'

$r \sim s$

rei 'axe'

sei 'arrow'

$v \sim s$

va 'bird'

sa 'meat'

$z \text{ vs. } v$

zun 'urine'

vun 'skin'

$s \sim h$

sun 'day'

hun 'time'

$r \sim l$

rum 'pit'

lum 'hot'



3.3.2. Description and distribution of consonantal phonemes

This section presents the description and distribution of the consonants in Kaipeng.

3.3.2.1 Plosives/Stops

There are three plosives in Kaipeng: *p*, *p^h* and *b*. When /*p*/ and /*b*/ are produced, there is a sudden release of air but when the /*p^h*/ is produced it is accompanied by forceful explosion of air.

/p/

/p/ is an unaspirated bilabial stop. It occurs in all the three positions: initial, medial and final.

Initial	Medial	Final
<i>pi</i> 'grandmother'	<i>maipɔl</i> 'white gourd'	<i>p^helep</i> 'butterfly'
<i>pat</i> 'thread'	<i>natpek</i> 'pain'	<i>tsap</i> 'weep'

/p^h/

/p^h/ is an aspirated bilabial stop. It occurs only in the initial and medial position of a word.

Initial	Medial	Final
<i>p^huŋ</i> 'stomach'	<i>rip^hɔ</i> 'leprosy'	- -
<i>p^hak</i> 'tannic'	<i>sarp^ha</i> 'turtle'	- -

/b/

/b/ is an unaspirated bilabial stop. It does not occur in the final position of a word but occurs in the initial and medial positions.

Initial	Medial	Final
<i>bɔkɔl</i> 'pocket'	<i>simbu</i> 'owl'	- -
<i>belra</i> 'woodapple'	<i>sirbi</i> 'stair'	- -

3.3.2.2. Alveolar Stops

Alveolar stops are produced with the tip or blade of the tongue against the teeth ridge. There are 3 alveolar stops: *t*, *t^h*, *d*. When /*t*/ and /*d*/ is produced there is a complete closure of the air stream and then there is a



sudden release of air and when /t^h/ is produced the air released is accompanied with a puff. /t/ and /t^h/ occurs in all three positions while /d/ occurs only in the initial and medial positions.

/t/

/t/ is an unaspirated alveolar stop. It occurs in the initial, medial and final position of a word.

Initial	Medial	Final
tuman 'pant'	lota 'bowl'	mit 'eye'
tui 'water'	kotra 'container'	alit 'leech (water)'

/t^h/

/t^h/ is an aspirated alveolar stop. It occurs in all the initial and medial position but does not occur in the final position.

Initial	Medial	Final
t ^h inj 'swell'	sert ^h um 'orange'	- -
t ^h a 'month'	mait ^h um 'pumpkin'	- -

/d/

/d/ is a voiced alveolar stop and it occurs in the initial and medial position of a word but is absent in the final position.

Initial	Medial	Final
dit 'love'	radaidai 'play'	- -
dai 'cold'	senduk 'brown'	- -

3.3.2.3 Velar Stops

Velar stops are produced when the back of the tongue is raised towards the soft palate. There are three velar stops in Kaipeng: /k, k^h, g/. /k/ and /g/ are produced with a sudden release of air after it is completely close at some time. The aspirated k^h on the other hand when produced is accompanied with forceful explosion of air. k occurs in the initial, medial and final positions whereas k^h and g occurs only in the initial and medial position.

/k/

/k/ is a voiceless unaspirated velar stop. It occurs in all the three positions of a word: initial medial and final.



Initial	Medial	Final
<i>kel</i> 'goat'	<i>inkɔt</i> 'door'	<i>leilak</i> 'ladder'
<i>kersimei</i> 'lamp'	<i>sakɔr</i> 'horse'	<i>rik</i> 'lice'

/k^h/

/k^h/ is an aspirated velar stop. It occurs in the initial and medial position of a word but does not occur in the final position.

Initial	Medial	Final
<i>k^hu</i> 'cough'	<i>sak^hi</i> 'deer'	- -
<i>k^hab</i> 'evening'	<i>ruk^huk</i> 'knee'	- -

/g/

/g/ is a voiced glottal stop and it occurs only in the initial position of a word and is absent in the medial and final positions.

Initial	Medial	Final
<i>gɔm</i> 'wheat'	<i>zagrai</i> 'shame'	- -
<i>gɔnda</i> 'rhinoceros'		- -

3.3.2.4. Affricates

An affricate sound is produced when the air in the mouth is expelled rapidly at first, but the separation that follows is gradual enough to produce audible friction. /tʃ/ is the only affricate consonant in Kaipeng. When /tʃ/ is produced, the tip of the tongue comes in contact with the alveolar ridge. /k/ occurs only in the initial and medial positions.

/tʃ/

/tʃ/ is a voiceless alveolar affricate. It occurs in the initial and medial position of a word but it does not occur in the final position.



Initial	Medial	Final
<i>tsi</i> 'salt'	<i>uitsɔk</i> 'frog'	- -
<i>tsiak</i> 'grass'	<i>kantsili</i> 'shirt'	- -

3.3.2.5. Nasals

Nasal sounds are produced by obstructing the air in the mouth and releasing the sound through the nose. There are three nasal sounds in Kaipeng phonological system: m, n, ŋ. During the articulation of /m/, the upper lip and the lower lip comes in contact with each other. The soft palate is lowered allowing the air to pass through the nose. /n/ is an alveolar nasal. During the production of /n/, the tip of the tongue firmly touches the alveolar ridge. /ŋ/ is a velar nasal. When /ŋ/ is produced, the back of the tongue touches the velum or the soft palate. All the three nasal consonants occur in all the three positions.

/m/

/m/ is a voiced bilabial nasal. It occurs in all the three positions that is initial, medial and final position.

Initial	Medial	Final
<i>muzu</i> 'rat'	<i>rumu</i> 'kite'	<i>nikum</i> 'last year'
<i>mezeŋ</i> 'cradle'	<i>dumde</i> 'firefly'	<i>bulum</i> 'hot rice'

/n/

/n/ is a voiced alveolar nasal. It also occurs in the initial, medial and final positions.

Initial	Medial	Final
<i>numei</i> 'widow'	<i>arnal</i> 'slippery'	<i>zan</i> 'night'
<i>nar</i> 'nose'	<i>denu</i> 'bow'	<i>sun</i> 'day'

/ŋ/

/ŋ/ is a voiced velar nasal. It occurs in the initial, medial and final position of a word.

Initial	Medial	Final
<i>ŋa</i> 'fish'	<i>saŋar</i> 'wild cat'	<i>ruluŋ</i> 'worm'



ŋamsa 'courage' *taŋval* 'young boy' *Luŋ* 'stone'

3.3.2.6 Trill

/r/

/r/ is an alveolar trill in Kaipeng. During the production of the consonant */r/*, the tip of the tongue quickly come in contact with the alveolar ridge. It can occur in all the three positions: initial, medial and finals.

Initial	Medial	Final
<i>riki</i> 'horn'	<i>sarkul</i> 'porcupine'	<i>t^har</i> 'new'
<i>rei</i> 'axe'	<i>arhei</i> 'nice'	<i>saŋmir</i> 'ant'

3.3.2.7 Fricatives

Fricative sounds are produced when the air is forced through a small opening in the mouth, such one between the teeth. *v* is a labio-dental fricative. It is articulated with the help of the upper teeth and lower lip. During the production of the sounds *s* and *z* the blade of the tongue is elevated towards the alveolar ridge in such a manner that there is a very little air gap between them. */s/* occurs in all the three positions while */z/* occurs only in the initial and medial position. */h/* is the glottal fricative. It occurs only in the initial and medial position.

/v/

/v/ is a voiced labiodental fricative. It occurs in the initial and medial position of a word but it does not occur in the final position.

Initial	Medial	Final
<i>vɔk</i> 'pig'	<i>pilvut</i> 'dust'	- -
<i>vɔmduk</i> 'grey'	<i>avani</i> 'today'	- -

/s/

/s/ is a voiceless alveolar fricative and it occurs in all the three positions that is initially, medially and finally.

Initial	Medial	Final
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ser 'lemon' *səmsɔta* 'pennywort' *raikɔs* 'monster'

sərika 'seven' *kuarset* 'deaf' *gurgus* 'rabbit'

/z/

/z/ is a voiced alveolar fricative. It occurs only in the initial and medial position but is absent in the final position.

Initial	Medial	Final
<i>zaip^hɔl</i> 'papaya'	<i>meiza</i> 'fan'	- -
<i>zan</i> 'night'	<i>əziŋ</i> 'dark'	- -

/h/

/h/ is a voiceless glottal fricative. It occurs only in the initial and medial position of a word.

Initial	Medial	Final
<i>hun</i> 'time'	<i>vahai</i> 'pelican'	- -
<i>ham</i> 'yawn'	<i>siŋhɔ</i> 'lion'	- -

3.3.2.8 Lateral

When the tongue prevents the airstream from passing through the centre of the mouth and instead moves along the sides, it produces a lateral sound.

The lateral sound //l/ in Kaipeng can occur in the initial, medial and final position.

//l/ is a voiced alveolar lateral and it occurs freely in all the three positions: initial, medial and final.

Initial	Medial	Final
<i>lau</i> 'startle'	<i>alb</i> 'medicine'	<i>el</i> 'light'
<i>lal</i> 'pride'	<i>mulai</i> 'radish'	<i>rəmul</i> 'bud'

4. SYLLABIC STRUCTURE

Based on the study, there are three syllabic patterns in Kaipeng: monosyllabic, disyllabic and trisyllabic.

**4.1 Monosyllabic**

VV	<i>ai</i>	'crab'
CV	<i>k^ha</i>	'bitter'
	<i>t^hi</i>	'blood'
CVV	<i>bei</i>	'cheap'
	<i>nei</i>	'rich'
CVC	<i>t^hum</i>	'sweet'
	<i>mit</i>	'eye'
CVVC	<i>kuar</i>	'ear'
	<i>puan</i>	'cloth'

4.2 Disyllabic

VC.CV	<i>arsi</i>	'star'
V.CVV	<i>u.nau</i>	'relative'
CV.CV	<i>nika</i>	'two'
CV.CVC	<i>luk^hum</i>	'pillow'
	<i>sakɔr</i>	'horse'
CV.CVV	<i>vahai</i>	'pelican'
	<i>luhai</i>	'headache'
CVC.CV	<i>belra</i>	'wood apple'
	<i>nigⁿnu</i>	'earthquake'

4.3 Trisyllabic

CVC.CV.CV	<i>kantsili</i>	'shirt'
	<i>p^harbili</i>	'pegon'
CV.CV.CV	<i>sarika</i>	'seven'
CV.CV.CVV	<i>tɔkɔrai</i>	'parrot'
CVC.CVV.CVC	<i>mantaurɔŋ</i>	'violet'



5 Conclusion

This paper presents the phonological system of Kaipeng focusing on the segmental features including consonants, vowels, diphthongs and syllable structure. Based on the analysis, it is found that in Kaipeng there are 19 consonants: 9 stops *p, b, t, d, k, g, p^h, t^h, k^h*, 1 affricate *ts*, 3 nasals *m, n, ŋ*, 1 trill *r*, 4 fricatives *v, s, z, h* and 1 lateral *l*. Kaipeng has 6 vowels *i, e, a, ə, ɔ, u* and 6 diphthongs : *ia, ai, ei, ui, au, ua* which occur in all three positions: initial, medial and final. There are three syllabic patterns in Kaipeng: monosyllabic, disyllabic and trisyllabic.

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