An Introductory Study of Monosyllables of Chungli

Mulunglemba Dzüvichü

Functional English Department, Fazl Ali College, Mokokchung

Abstract

Chungli is one of the few recognised languages in the state of Nagaland. It is taught in various institutions with the motive to let learn, develop, and preserve the language so as to sustain an identity as well. The study intends to linguistically fine-tune and highlight some of the characteristic features that can be found in Chungli. Chungli is a tone language and belongs to the Tibeto-Burman language family. The paper discusses some of the possible monosyllabic structures under Chungli. Also, it examines the possible, and the regular templates of these structures, in terms of maximal and minimal templates of Chungli using Optimality Theory (OT) as the framework.

Introduction

The origin of the Aos can be traced back to a place called Chungliyimti where lies six stones placed one on top of the other forming more or less like a pyramidal symmetry. It is said that Aos originated from these six stones (Lung trok).

The Aos are distinguished through groups based on their cultural and linguistic differences: Chungli, Mongsen and Changki. On the basis of these distinctions, the Aos speak varied dialects (of chungli)which are agglutinative and follow a subject object verb (SOV) word order. These dialects are largely unintelligible to each other (Temsunungsang, 2009).

The majority of Chungli and Mongsen speakers of the Ao community are concentrated in the district of Mokokchung and its surrounding villages. And Chungli is considered the standard language which is spoken widely in and around Mokokchung. It should be noted that each village speaks a different variant of the language, although the standard language being Chungli.

Chungli is said to have derived from the word 'jonglier' meaning 'shield buyers'. Chungliers speak one of the languages of the Aos called Chungli. Under the influence of early American Christian missionaries, the Aos, like the other Naga communities have adapted the roman script as the standard form for writing.

Methodology

This study is an attempt to establish a basic understanding of the monosyllabic structures in Chungli language of the Ao community in Nagaland. The Optimality Theory (OT) approach has been used as a framework to deduce the research of the language.

The data for the research has been collected, and analysed from the speakers of the language as well as students, and research scholars who are studying this language.

The Language genealogy

The Naga language belongs to the Tibeto-Burman family. And the language is further divided into three groups; the western sub-group, the central sub-group, and the eastern sub-group. The western sub-group comprises Angami, Sema, Rengma and Chakhesang languages. The central sub-group includes Ao, Lotha and Phom languages.

The Eastern sub-group is made up of, Chang and Konyak languages. Shafer (1966), groups Ao under the Northern Naga branch of the Burmic division in the Sino-Tibetan family. Grierson (1967), classifies Ao as belonging to the central group of Assam-Burmese Branch. And Burlings (2000), groups similar and prominent languages of the Northeast India and indicates Ao-Chungli and Ao-Mongsen as part of the Ao group of languages.

1. Monosyllable

Mono as defined is a prefix used in phonetics and linguistics to refer to the unitary manifestation of a linguistic concept with a multiple one. Therefore, a *monosyllable* is defined as a single syllable. Some examples with words and possible structures are as follows:

V_1	/i/	'wine'
V_1V_2	/au/	'bamboo'
V_1C_1	/ak/	'pig'
$V_1V_2C_1$	/auk/	'swept.PAST'
C_1V_1	/ni/	'I'
$C_1V_1V_2$	/taa/	'salary'
$C_1V_1C_2$	/hun/	'gold'
$C_1V_1V_2C_2$	/shiuk/	'put.PAST'

V_1 though brings out a problem whether to accept it as a long vowel or as a short vowel. This part is left untouched for the time being. Looking at the pair of V_1V_2 one observes that in words like 'ao' meaning 'went', 'ai' meaning 'thorn' or 'au' meaning 'bamboo' etc. V_2 also acts as optional with V_1 constituting the head. The open syllable structure $C_1V_1C_1$ extends the possibilities of constituting and filling up the onset with any of the thirteen consonants of Chungli. (*i.e*, /p/,/b/,/t/,/d/,/k/,/c/,j/,/m/,/n/,/r/,/l/,/w/,/h/).

Table a.

	I	ə	A	u
I	X			
ə		X		
A			X	
U				X

Here as indicated in the table above (**a.**), **X** act as a delimiter to the vowel pairs and those adjacent and therefore prohibiting such occurrences, which is realised by the obligatory contour principle rule (OCP), disallowing adjacent similar elements from all tiers but the skeleton.

$C_1V_1V_2C_2$ is considered the maximal template in Chungli, which we will come to later. Under such a construction, C_1 has the liberty of using the fricatives, nasals and laterals.

The above examples were some of the possible syllabic structures under Chungli. We further on move to examine the possible and the regular templates of these structures, in terms of maximal and minimal templates of the Chungli.

2. Templates
a) Minimal Template – What one understands by minimal template is that it is the least (single) possible syllable structure. The minimal template in Chungli is found to be single V with the possibilities in two forms, i.e., 'u' and 'i'. That can be as 'i'-meaning 'wine' and 'u'- meaning 'word'. Therefore when it is single V, the possibilities are 'u' and 'i' only.

S is the syllable or the PARENT node and V is the head, which is also the SIBLING immediately dependent to the PARENT node.

b) Maximal Template- The maximal structure of the Chungli is CVVC, earlier reference being $C_1V_1V_2C_2$, but both are the same except that it has numeric stems added to it.
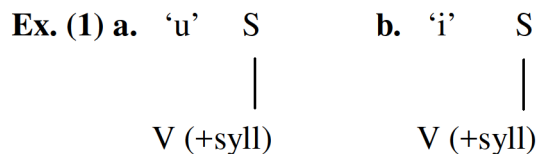
Ex. (1) a. 'u' S   **b.** 'i' S

V (+syll)   V (+syll)

S is the syllable or the PARENT node and V is the head, which is also the SIBLING immediately dependent to the PARENT node.

(2) a.

```
              S
            /   \
        Onset   Rime
          |      /  \
          |  Nucleus  Coda
          |   /  \      |
        (C₁) V₁  (V₂)  (C₂)
```
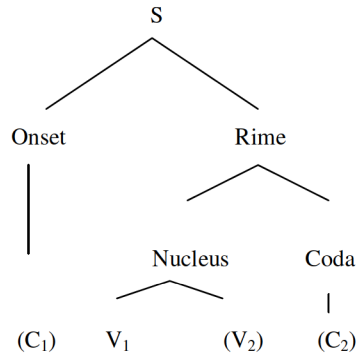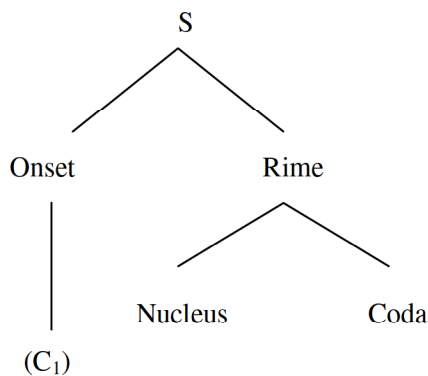
Figure 1.

C_1 V_2 and C_2 under this structure (**Figure 1**) represent the optional parenthesis, while V_1 remains as the base. C_1, which is the onset, allows a maximum of one consonant and can be filled by any of the other eleven possible consonants. As shown below ((**3**) **a.**).

(3) a.

```
              S
            /   \
        Onset   Rime
          |      /  \
         (C₁) Nucleus  Coda
```
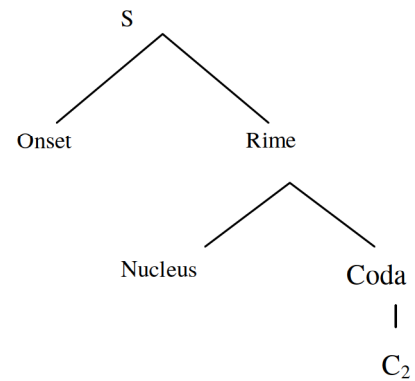
(+lat)(-syll)(+son)(+nas)

The nucleus V_1 constitutes the head and V_2, which is an optional slot, precedes a vowel as in this case V_1. Here V_2 remains as a dependent element though it has thecapacity to accommodate four possible vowels (**Figure 1**). The Coda (i.e., C_2) takes the final position, which is also a closed syllable. And therefore C_2 limits and remains the maximal stretch for the Chungli((**4**) **a.**).

(4) a.

```
              S
            /   \
        Onset   Rime
                 /  \
            Nucleus  Coda
                       |
                      C₂
```
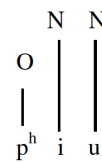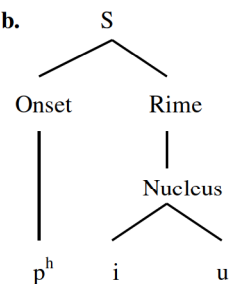
3.Sonority Hierarchy

Syllables are formed depending on the principle of sonority. What one understands by sonority hierarchy is that, it is a universal ranking of segments according to the amount of sonority each carries. The most sonorous elements are assigned the highest value and, the least sonorous the lowest value.

(5) a.

```
        N   N
   O    |   |
   |    |   |
   pʰ   i   u
```

(5) b.

```
              S
            /   \
        Onset   Rime
          |       |
          |    Nucleus
          |     /   \
         pʰ    i     u
```

The centre of a syllable nucleus (N) is defined as the place where sonority is greatest. Peak pressure starts at the onset then there is nuclei rise and fall at the coda.

To get a clearer picture we will introduce the sonority scale:

Most sonorous	5 Non-High Vowels
	4 Vowels
	3 Liquids
	2 Nasals
Less sonorous	1 Obstruents

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$V_1 V_2$ both the syllables belong to the category of vowel and non-high vowels. In Chungli it is found that the possible tonal combinations in disyllabic verbs are HH, MM and HL.

We look into some words in Chungli concerning if ever there is any violation. They are as follows:

|		
au	= /ʌu/ –	Bamboo
ai	= /sai/ –	Play
əi	= /kəi/ –	Tiger
iu	= /pʰiu/–	whistle
ui	= /ui/ –	Fowl
ua	= /mua/ –	Bless
iə	= /shiəm/–	Select
əə	= /tsəək/ –	Fall

Chungli exhibits just one tonal contrast, which is HL as in the case of disyllabic verbs (**Table 1**).

(C)V Obs	(C)V Son
sáàk wake	sáì play
tsəək fall	səì cross by
áù? bamboo	
áà? earn	

Table 1.

It is also observed that in the monosyllable structure of Chungli, tonal spreading is blocked within the syllable. The language also does not allow distinct vowel length as in the case of spreading, disallowing permittance of High and Mid tones in monosyllabic verbs and providing an only option and possibility that is, by inserting a High tone by dissimilation next to a Low tone (6 a.)

(6 a.)

$$
\begin{array}{cc}
H & T \\
\vdots & \downarrow \\
\downarrow & \\
S & S
\end{array}
$$
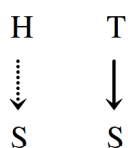
Departing from the monosyllabic verbs we now look into the monosyllabic noun forms. In the noun form, words like /áàk/ 'pig' /ám/ 'banana leaf' and /án/ 'hen' vowels in /áàk/ is found to be longer than /ám/, whereas /án/ and /ám/ seems to have almost the same duration.

The question again arises as to what about is the left-most part of the vowels in /áàk/? The second lexical element, which is also a sonorant, undergoes a lengthening process to accommodate the extra tone. Further on, in Chungli, the tonal sequence ML is not allowed in the language. Under the tone bearing units, LL too would not be allowed as it violates the Obligatory contour Principle (OCP) which does not allow similar tones and from occurring adjacently. The other possibility being as mentioned earlier HL since the monosyllabic verbs attest only the HL tonal combination.

Phonetic evidence shows that the durational difference between mono and disyllabic does have not much revealing from the lengthening process. However, in the monosyllabic noun considering the word /kèn/ 'song' which gives a single Low tone and the monosyllabic verbs /kén/ 'once' having a High tone. One observes that in monosyllabic verbs the single vowel /é/ goes under elongation in order to accommodate the extra tone. Thus, although the native speakers of Chungli may not make out between long vowels and short vowels, evidence proves that monosyllabic verbs carry two tone bearing units which are linked up to two different tones High and Low respectively.

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