

The Vowel System of the Lhavo Language

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Abstract

The Lhavo is a sub-group of Tibheti-Burman descended down from the Mongo Hill to the south. The Lhavo language is the second most popular language in Kachin State. In this research, the vowel system, which is the basic system of the Lhavo language, is studied. First, definition and classification of the vowel sounds are presented and it is followed by the study of the vowels, nasal vowels, glottal stop vowels and the diphthongs of the Lhavo language.

Key words: Vowel, vowel classification, Lhavo vowel, Lhavo diphthongs

Introduction

This paper studies the vowel system of the Lhavo language. The vowel system is analysed based on the position of the tongue, the movement of the tongue, the position of the lips and the movement of the lips. When analyzing the vowels used in the Lhavo language, it was found that there are seven pure vowels in that language, namely /ɪ/, /ε/, /E/, /α/, /O/, /o/, /ʊ/. Moreover, the central vowel /★/ is also present in the language. These seven vowels can be divided into two main categories depending on where they occur: front of the tongue vowels which are /ɪ/, /ε/, /E/, /α/ and back of the tongue vowels, which are /O/, /o/, /ʊ/. When examining the vowels in terms of place of articulation and manner of articulation, two vowels, /I/, /u/ are found to be the closed vowels and two vowels, /e/, /o/ half-close vowels, /E/, /O/ the half-open vowels, and /a/ an open vowel. When analyzing the vowels in terms of the position and movement of the lips, two kinds of vowels are found: lip-spreading vowels and lip-rounding vowels. In addition, nasal vowels and glottal stop vowels and diphthongs are also explained with examples in this study. This research is carried out to study the vowel system of the Lhavo language and to investigate whether its vowel system is the same as that of the Myanmar language.

Vowel

From the phonological point of view, vowels are defined as all voiced sounds, except when they are whispered. The air stream comes out freely through the pharynx and the mouth, and the vowel quality depends on the shape of the oral cavity as modified by the position of the tongue and the lips (Jones, 1967). However, in phonology a vowel is defined as a sound which can occur in the nucleus of a syllable.

Vowel classification

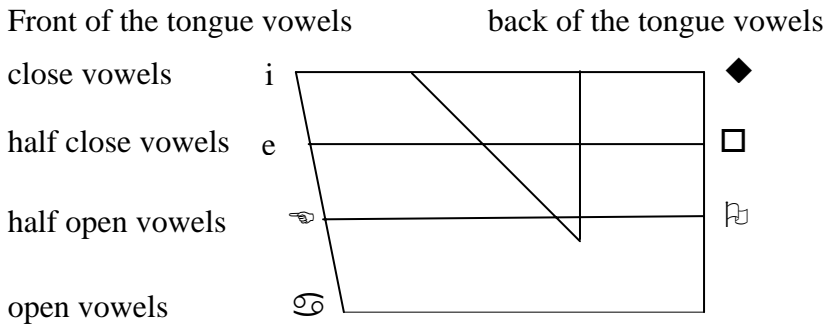
The vowel system of the Lhavo language is described in terms of Jones' (1967) cardinal vowel system. The sonority of the vowel sound is based on the movement of the tongue and the lips.

- (i) close vowel
- (ii) open vowel

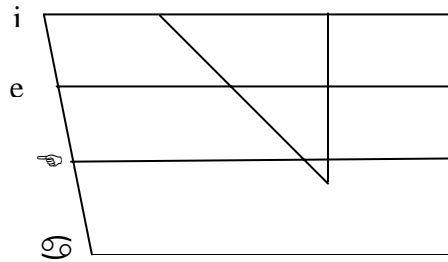
- (iii) half close vowel
- (iv) half open vowel
- (v) lip-spreading vowel
- (vi) lip-rounding vowel
- (vii) central vowel

Lhavo Vowels

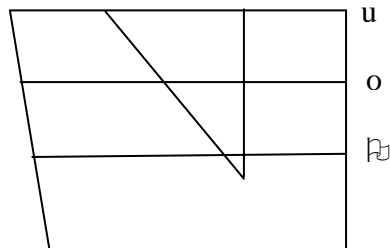
The vowels of the Lhavo language can be seen in the following diagrams.



Lip-spreading



Lip - rounding



Front close spreading vowel / i /

pronunciation

/-mji/

☞ ☞ ◆ ② ☞ ☞ ☞ ☞ ☞

☞ ☞ ☞ ● ☞ ☞

☞ ☞ ◆ ☞ ☞ ☞ ☞ ☞ ☞ ☞

☞ ☞ ☞ ● i ☞

meaning

fire




























leg

trousers

fruits and cereals

begin, start

Front half close spreading vowel / e /

pronunciation	meaning
/-  -  -  -  -  -  -  -  -  -  -  -  -  -  -  -  -  -  -  -  -  -  -  -  -  -  -  - -	

pronunciation

/ 𑄣𑄢 /

𑄣𑄢 𑄣𑄢

𑄣𑄢 𑄣𑄢

𑄣𑄢 𑄣𑄢

𑄣𑄢 𑄣𑄢

meaning

foundation

all other persons

stand

cucumber

dance

Back close rounding vowel / u /

pronunciation

/ 𑄣𑄢𑄣𑄢𑄣𑄢 𑄣𑄢𑄣𑄢 /

𑄣𑄢 𑄣𑄢𑄣𑄢 𑄣𑄢𑄣𑄢 /

𑄣𑄢 𑄣𑄢𑄣𑄢 𑄣𑄢𑄣𑄢

𑄣𑄢 𑄣𑄢𑄣𑄢 𑄣𑄢𑄣𑄢

meaning

jingle bell

pumpkin

flower

coax

Central vowel / ★ /

pronunciation

/ ★ 𑄣𑄢 /

𑄣𑄢 𑄣𑄢

𑄣𑄢 𑄣𑄢

𑄣𑄢 𑄣𑄢

𑄣𑄢 𑄣𑄢

𑄣𑄢 𑄣𑄢

𑄣𑄢 𑄣𑄢

meaning

black

red

blue

white

root

shell

bone

Nasal vowels / 𑄣𑄢 /, / 𑄣𑄢 /, / 𑄣𑄢 /

pronunciation

/ 𑄣𑄢𑄣𑄢𑄣𑄢 /

𑄣𑄢 𑄣𑄢𑄣𑄢 /

𑄣𑄢 𑄣𑄢𑄣𑄢

𑄣𑄢 𑄣𑄢𑄣𑄢

𑄣𑄢 𑄣𑄢𑄣𑄢

meaning

rice

house

horse

bear

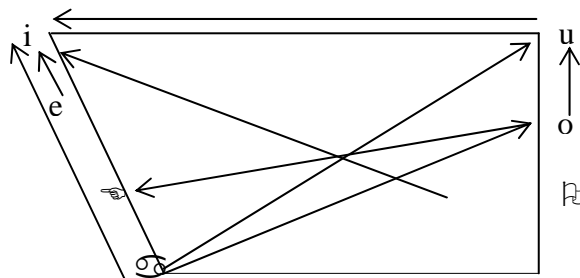
ability

Glottle stop / 𑄣𑄢 /

pronunciation	meaning
/ ၇၉ /	mirror
အံ ၂၀၂ /	feel tired
အံ ၂၀၂၉၂ အံ	read
အံ ၂၇၉ အံ	duck
အံ ၂၀၂ ၂၉၂ အံ	water bottle
အံ ၂၇၉ ၂၀၂ အံ	chopping hoe

Lhavo diphthongs

Tun Myint (1996) defines diphthong as a combination of two or more vowels. Diphthongs occur when the position of the tongue changes suddenly from one vowel to another. There are seven diphthongs in the Lhavo language; namely, / ei /, / ou /, / ai /, / ui /, / au /, / ၂i /, / ၂ /. These diphthongs can be divided into two categories: short diphthongs and long diphthongs. / ei /, / ou /, / ui / are short diphthongs and / ai /, / au /, / ၂i /, / ၂ / are long diphthongs. Whether a diphthong is short or long is measured in terms of the distance between the place where the first vowel is produced and the place where the second vowel is produced.



short diphthong / ei /

pronunciation	meaning
/ ၂၉၂ /	die
အံ ၂၉၂ /	lend
အံ ၂၉၂ ၂၉၂ /	sunset
အံ ၂၉၂ ၂၉၂ အံ	instruct

short diphthong / ou /

pronunciation	meaning
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/ \er□◆&/	flow
အံ \&၎်□◆& /	steal
အံ \O□◆&/	become windy
အံ \er□◆& မံ၎်□◆&အံ	inflict
အံ \&၎်□◆& မံ၎်လှဲ→အံ	bamboo wall

short diphthong / ui /

pronunciation	meaning
/ မံ၎်&၎်◆& /	collect
အံ လှဲ◆& /	move
အံ &◆& /	make full use
အံ မံ၎်◆& မံ၎်&၎်◆&အံ	take of money
အံ မံ၎်◆& မံ၎်လှဲ◆&အံ	silver necklace
အံ &၎်★ မံ၎်◆②◆& ◆②◆& /	swing

long diphthong / ai /

pronunciation	meaning
/ မံ၎်မံ၎်→& /	tooth
အံ ၎်လှဲ→ /	box
အံ မံ၎်●လှဲ→ /	fry
အံ မံ၎်လှဲ→ မံ၎်လှဲ	clothes

long diphthong / au /

pronunciation	meaning
/ မံ၎်လှဲ→ /	child
အံ ၎်လှဲ→ /	copy
အံ မံ၎်လှဲ→ /	pound
အံ မံ၎်●□ မံ၎်လှဲ→ /	arm
အံ ★ ၎်လှဲ→	between
အံ ၎်လှဲ→	dig

long diphthong / □ /

pronunciation	meaning
/ မံ၎်◆②မံ၎် /	waterfall

အံ	●★ & ခြေခုံခုံ/	mollusc
အံ	II ဝ ခုံ/	be hungry
အံ	၇ ခုံ ခုံ/	fall
အံ	၇ ခုံ ခုံ/	became

long diphthong / ဝိ /

pronunciation	meaning
/ ဝိ ဝိ /	snake
အံ ဝိ ဝိ /	block
အံ ဝိ ဝိ /	silver
အံ ဝိ ဝိ /	easy

Discussion

It is observed that in the vowel system of the Lhavo language, the vowels can be produced only when they are followed by the final consonant or the nasal vowel or the tone. Most of the oral vowels are the original vowels, which do not contain the final consonant. Moreover, it was found that the diphthongs which tend to the closing of the lips are used more than other diphthongs and there is no glottal stop in the long diphthongs of the Lhavo language.

When studying the vowel system of the Lhavo language, it was found that some diphthongs like / ει /, / αι /, / αυ /, / ου / are quite similar to those in the Myanmar language. However, some vowels like / υι /, / oE /, / Oι / which are absent in the Myanmar language are present in their language.

Conclusion

In conclusion, as this research studies the basic system of the speech formation in the Lhavo language, it is hoped that this research will be of great help not only for those who study the vowel system of other languages but also for those linguists who are interested in the Lhavo language.

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