



REVIEW ARTICLE

INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
ISSN-2 3 4 9 - 9 4 5 1

Vol.1.Issue.3.,2014

**“CONTRASTIVE PHONOTACTICS OF CONSONANTS IN ENGLISH AND ASSAMESE”
(Gauhati University, Gauhati)**

From

Journal of the Linguistic Society of India, Indian Linguistics (Vol.72. No.1-4. 2011)

PINKY SAGOLSEM

Research Scholar, Ph. D. Registration No: 2865/2011, Dept of Linguistics, Manipur
University,Canchipur, IMPHAL, Manipur, India



PINKY SAGOLSEM

Article Received : 26/10/2014

Article Revised:14/11/2014

Article Accepted:17/11/2014

Anita Tamuli, the author of this article, holds an M.A. and Mphil from Pune University, and Ph.D from Gauhati University. She has done P.G.D.T.E. from Hyderabad. At present she is an associate professor in the department of English Language Teaching, Gauhati University. She is also the coordinator of LEIT Programme. Her area of specialization is Phonetics, Materials Designs, and Methods of Teaching. She is also a scholarship winner from laTefl Scholarship.

In this paper, I summarize the article and offer comments about selected aspects. To complement the article, some extra information is also added. For example, the author in her paper does not explain the term ‘phonotactics’, while the paper itself is based on the phonotactics. Thereby, I feel a need to explain the term used.

©COPY RIGHT ‘KY PUBLICATIONS’

Anita Tamuli’s article addresses one particular aspect of the overall phonotactics of English and Assamese. Anita Tamuli investigates the consonant phonemes of English and Assamese in terms of their permissible patterns of distribution in larger phonological contexts. The syllable and the word are taken as the larger phonological contexts within which patterns occurrences of the consonants will be examined. The article is presented in three sections. For a detailed and systematic study, the sections are further divided into sub-sections. This shows the skillfull nature of the author.The first section is all about the introduction of the article. In second and third sections, the author investigates the consonant patterns of English and Assamese in the various word positions based on the phonological rule of the occurrences of sequences or clusters of consonants in initial, medial or final positions of a word like that of a single consonants. Section four deals with the contrast between the consonant patterns of the two languages, that is, English and Assamese.

Section 1: Section one deals with a brief introduction about the concept and structure of the article. According to Kaleissin, “Phonotactics comes from the ancient Greek phōne which means voice, sound and taktikós means having to do with arranging. Phonotactics is a branch of phonology that deals with restrictions in a language on the permissible combinations of phonemes. Phonotactics defines permissible syllable structure, consonants clusters and vowel sequences by means of phonotactical constraints. Phonotactic

constraints are language specific". For example, in Japanese, consonant clusters like /st/ do not occur. Likewise, the sounds /kn/ and /gn/ are not permitted at the beginning of a word in Modern English but are in German and Dutch, and were permitted in Old and Middle English.

Anita Tamuli very clearly stated the importance of vowels and consonants in the study of phonology of a language. Vowels and consonants constitute the segmental totality of all languages. She admitted that the prime objective of any contrastive or non-contrastive description of language is to make "statements of permissible strings of phonemes. For example, clusters, syllables, distributional restrictions, admissible syllable types. Thus, in this section, the author logically indicated that the article is about the contrastive study of consonant phonemes of English and Assamese in terms their phonotactic constraints. Further, in this section the author talked about the structure of the article, that is, the division of the article into four sections; describing the contents of each sections.

Section 2: In this section, Anita Tamuli, with the help of a table displayed the possible English consonants in various positions of the word. The possible English consonant clusters or sequences in word initial are CC and CCC. In word medial three clusters are found, they are CC, CCC and CCCC. For the final word positions three possible English consonant clusters or sequences are CC, CCC and CCCC.

The initial and final clusters of English are discussed in the following sub-sections. Due to the open-ended nature of the English language, the author has made no attempt to exemplify the medial sequences English in inter word positions.

Initial Clusters: Anita Tamuli displayed the possible fifty English clusters of two consonants in the word- initial positions. She also cited the examples of each clusters. The author discovered that some clusters are relatively rare and are found in borrowed words of foreign sources. These possible fifty initial two-consonant (CC) clusters are as follows:

/pl/	play	/gr/	grand	/sr/	Sri-lanka
/pr/	pray	/gj/	gules	/sj/	suit
/pj/	pure	/gw/	Gwen	/sw/	away
/tr/	try	/mj/	mute	/sp/	spy
/tj/	tune	/mw/	muesli	/st/	sty
/tw/	twice	/nj/	new	/sk/	sky
/kl/	clean	/lj/	lure	/sm/	smile
/kr/	cry	/fl/	float	/sn/	snail
/kj/	cure	/fr/	free	/sf/	sphinx
/kw/	quick	/fj/	few	/sv/	svelte
/bl/	black	/vl/	Vladimir /ʃl/		Schlesinger
/br/	brown	/vr/	vroom	/ʃr/	shrimp
/bj/	beauty	/vj/	view	/ʃw/	Schweppes
/dr/	dry	/θr/	through /ʃm/		schmaltz
/dj/	dual	/θj/	thew	/ʃn/	schnapps
/dw/	dwaf	/θw/	thwack	/hj/	huge
/gl/	glide	/sl/	slow		

Three- member Clusters: table 3 of the article illustrated the three consonant clusters permitted in initial positions of English words. The author has tested only ten CCC clusters. She has illustrated the unique occurrence of /smj/:

/spl/	split	/skl/	sclerosis
/spr/	spring	/skr/	scream
/spj/	spurious/skj/	skew	
/str/	strike	/skw/	squire
/stj/	steward /smj/	smew	

Final Clusters: Table 4 and table 5 of the article indicate the possible English clusters in the word- final positions. In English, the word final consonant cluster varies from two-member sequences to four member sequences.

Word final two consonant (CC) clusters are:

/pt/	apt	/md/	harmed	/ip/	gulp
/pθ/	depth	/mf/	triumph	/lt/	melt
/ps/	lapse	/mθ/	warmth	/lk/	bulk
/tθ/	eighth	/mz/	comes	/lb/	alb
/ts/	prints	/nt/	grant	/ld/	old
/kt/	tract	/nd/	hand	/ltʃ/	mulch
/ks/	tax	/ntʃ/	bench	/ldʒ/	buldge
/bd/	ribbed	/ndʒ/	range	/lm/	realm
/bz/	cubs	/nθ/	tenth	/ln/	kiln
/dz/	adds	/ns/	tense	/lf/	golf
/gd/	bagged	/nz/	bronze	/lv/	salve
/gz/	rags	/ŋk/	sink	/lθ/	wealth
/tʃt/	matched/ŋd/	banged	/ls/	false	
/dʒd/	judged	/ŋz/	sings	/lz/	calls
/mp/	tramp	/θt/	worthed	/lf/	Welsh
/ft/	laughed /θs/	wealths	/st/	test	
/fθ/	fifth	/ðd/	bathed	/sk/	risk
/f/	coughs	/ðz/	bathes	/zd/	raised
/vd/	lived	/sp/	clasp	/ʃt/	wished
/vz/	loves			/ʒd/	camouflaged

Three- member Clusters: forty nine three member word final English clusters are shown in the table 5 of the article. They are:

/pst/	lapsed	/ldʒd/	bulged	/fts/	lifts
/tst/	keatsed	/lmd/	overwhelemed	/fθs/	fifths
/kst/	pretext	/lvd/	shelved	/sps/	wasps
/dst/	midst	/pts/	interrupts	/sts/	lists
/mpt/	tempt	/pθs/	depths	/sks/	asks
/nst/	against	/tθs/	eighths	/ndz/	winds
/ntʃt/	wrenched	/kts/	potects	/lbz/	bulbs
/ŋst/	angst	/mps/	jumps	/ldz/	holds
/ŋkt/	instinct	/mfs/	triumphs	/lmz/	helms
/lst/	whilst	/nts/	prints	/lnz/	kilns
/lpt/	gulped	/nθs/	ninths	/lvz/	shelves
/lkt/	mulet	/ŋks/	sinks	/ksθ/	sixth
/ltʃt/	filched	/lps/	gulps	/ntθ/	ninth
/spt/	clasped	/lts/	cults	/ŋkθ/	length
/skt/	risked	/lks/	sulks	/lfθ/	twelfth
/ndʒd/	arranged	/lfs/	gulfs		
/nzd/	bronzed /lθs/	filths			

Four- member Clusters: Table six shows the four consonant clusters permitted in word-final positions. They are:

/mpts/	prompts	/lfθs/	twelfths
/mpst/	glimpsed	/ksts/	texts
/lkts/	mullets	/ksθs/	sixths
/lpts/	sculpts	/ntθs/	thousandths

From the examples, it has been observed that a final CCCC cluster occur only as a result of the suffixation to CCC final stems of a past tense morpheme (:/t/) or a plural 3rd person singular morpheme (:/s/). The author felt the need to made few observations on the phonotactic constraints on individual consonantal segments in English.

- i. /ŋ/ does not occur initially
- ii. /h,r,j,w/ do not occur finally
- iii. Finally, only /l/ can occur before non-syllabic /m,n/.

Medial Sequences: the author observed that the occurrence of consonant sequences or clusters in the medial at syllable boundaries in polysyllabic words is more than the initial and final positions. The treatment of medial sequences is complicated because of the issue of syllable division as there is no intervallic sequence without syllabic separation before, after or within it.

Anita Tamuli has also made a statement on the most common two-, three-, and four member clusters sequences which can appear within the same syllable boundaries. It has been found that all initial clusters can be found medially as sequences. Many of the final clusters can occur in a word internal positions. A medial sequence can be formed by a combination of a final two-member cluster, or by a combination of a final two- member cluster plus an initial two member cluster, or by the combination of a consonant

plus an initial cluster of two to three consonants. Further, a combination of two to three consonants which does not occur as an initial or final cluster can be medial in a word.

Section 3: In this section, the author gave a detailed description of Assamese consonant phonotactics. Since, Assamese has numerous nature of medial sequences the author has limited her study to two- consonant sequences with their examples. Table 7 displayed the phonactic possibilities of Assamese consonants in the bodies of words. Initially CC and CCC consonant cluster are found. In the word medial final there are CC, CCC and CCCC clusters in Assamese.

Initial clusters: In Assamese, there are forty possible clusters of two consonants in word- initial position. Table 8 of the article clearly displayed said forty clusters. The examples of the initial two-consonant (CC) clusters are given below:

/pl/	/plabɔn/	'flood'	/gr/	/grina/	'revulsion'
/pr/	/prijɔ/	'favourite'	/ml/	/mlan/	'faded'
/tr/	/tripti/	'satisfaction'	/mr/	/mritɔ/	'dead'
/tj/	/tjag/	'sacrifice'	/nr/	/nripot/	'king'
/kl/	/kled/	'muck', 'filth'	/nj/	/njai/	'justice'
/kr/	/krɔm/	'sequence'	/sl/	/slɔ/	'loose'
/p ^h r/	/p ^h rɔk/	'frock'	/sr/	/sri/	'beauty'
/k ^h r/	/k ^h ristan/	'Christian'	/sj/	/sjuti/	'detachment'
/k ^h j/	/k ^h jati/	'fame'	/sw/	/swikar/	'confession'
/bl/	/bled/	'blade'	/sp/	/spɔstɔ/	'distinct'
/br/	/britti/	'profession'	/st/	/stɔr/	'layer'
/bj/	/bji/	'expenditure'	/sk/	/skul/	'school'
/dr/	/drutɔ/	'swift'	/sp ^h /	/sp ^h itɔ/	'bloated'
/dj/	/djɔtɔk/	'modulator'	/st ^h /	/st ^h an/	'place'
/gl/	/glani/	'remorse'	/sk ^h /	/sk ^h ɔlɔn/	'erosion'
/gr/	/grah/	'devour'	/sm/	/smriti/	'memory'
/gj/	/gjan/	'knowledge'	/sn/	/snan/	'bath'
/br/	/brɔm/	'illusion'	/zj/	/zjamiti/	'geometry'
/dr/	/drubɔ/	'the star'	/zw/	/zwalamuk ^h i/	'volcano'
/dj/	/djan/	'meditation'	/hr/	/hrɔd/	'lake'

Three- member Clusters: The author found that the occurrence of three-consonant cluster is rare in Assamese. Table 9 shows the initial three-consonant clusters in Assamese. The clusters with examples are:

/spr/	/spriha/	'desire'
/str/	/stri/	'woman, wife'
/smr/	/smriti/	'memory'

Final Clusters: In Assamese like the three member cluster, the consonant sequences in the final word position are rare. Table 10 shows the permitted word final consonant clusters. The clusters and their examples are given below:

/nt/	/sint/	'think!'	/rp/	/ɔrp/	'give!'
/nd/	/kand/	'cry!'	/rz/	/arz/	'earn!'
/nd/	/bɔnd/	'closed'	/rh/	/pɔrh/	'read!'
/ns/	/bɔns/	'derive'	/mb/	/lɔmb/	'haunt'
/nh/	/bɔnh/	'closed'			

Medial Sequences: In Assamese, two-consonant clusters variety is more than the three or four consonants. The three or four consonant clusters consists mostly of the sequences beginning with /s, m, n, / and ends invariably with /r/, for example, /istri/ 'iron'; /zɔntrɔ / 'machine'; /hɔŋsr/ 'culture'; /hɔmbɔrm/ 'dignity'. Table 11 of the article displayed the possible Assamese two-consonant sequences in the medial positions. The clusters with their examples are as follows:

/rb/	/gɔrbɔ/	'vanity'	/rg/	/bɔrgɔ/	'square'
/rb/	/gɔrbɔ/	'foetus'	/rg/	/durgɔr/	'intense'
/rt/	/d ^h urtɔ/	'rascal'	/rh/	/ɔrhɔta/	'qualification'
/rt/	/art ^h ik/	'economics'	/rh/	/ɔrhɔ/	'piles'
/rd/	/pɔrda/	'curtain'	/rm/	/bɔrmɔn/	'a surname'
/rd/	/bɔrdɔn/	'increase'	/rn/	/durnam/	'ill-repute'
/rk/	/dɔrkar/	'need'	/rl/	/durlɔb/	'rare'
/rk/	/murk ^h /	'fool'			

The author has laid down some observation with regard to the two consonant medial clusters. And that is, most initial clusters can also be found medially. However, it has been observed that the sequences /bl, hr, zw/ as well as /bj, dj, sj, zj, nj/ do not occur word medially. Several restrictions of the occurrence of most of the medial sequences in the word final have been come out. It has been found out that all the final sequences except /nh/ can occur word-medially.

Section 4: This section deals with the contrastive phonotactics of English and Assamese consonants. In order to show their contrast, tabular form is adopted. In order to heighten the understanding of the reader, the author has incorporated symbols and their functions. Table 12, 13 and 14 displayed in detailed the initial CC contrasts, initial CCC contrasts and final CC contrasts of the English and Assamese consonants contrasts respectively. For the quick review, all the possible contrasts patterns at the various positions of the word are summed up in table 15 of the article. The table 15 shows the significant differences between the phonotactic possibilities in the bodies of words at all the three positions between the two languages. The author opined that these differences will be of pedagogical importance from the view point of Assamese learning English.

From the above study Anita Tamuli has come to various conclusions. I am giving her conclusion in point-wise manner. Her conclusions are as follows:

- i. For the initial clusters: - though an ample number of the two-consonant clusters are common to both the languages, a large number is exclusive to English. Half of these involve consonants such as /f, v, ʃ, ʒ, θ / which are not found in Assamese. The alien clusters involves consonants common to both languages, but forming clusters that are not found in Assamese are /pj, mj, dj, lj, tw and kw/. For the initial clusters of three consonants, most of those found in English do not occur in Assamese.
- ii. For medial sequences: - eleven germinated sequences that occur in Assamese do not have counterparts in English.
- iii. For final clusters: - as compared to Assamese English has more variety in the final clusters both in kind as well as number. Final clusters in Assamese are restricted to two-consonant clusters only--- and these are limited to six. Therefore, Assamese learners of finds formidable difficulties in the three and four consonant clusters in word final positions of English.

The author in this article has pointed out some significant fact about the Assamese language. For instance, the author pointed out that many of the Assamese word corpuses in the contemporary Assamese lexicon constitute a legacy from the ancestral language Sanskrit. She has also stated the fact that modern Assamese words are conspicuously free of consonant clusters.

To conclude, Anita Tamuli has very systematically and logically presented her paper. I am sure that the used of the tabular form will really heightened the understanding of the reader. This article has high pedagogical value for the Assamese learners learning English. This article may also be a guideline to all those who are interested in contrastive studies. I personally enjoyed reviewing this article.

REFERENCES

- Crystal, David. *The Cambridge Encyclopaedia of Language*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996.
- Fasold, W. Ralph. *An Introduction To Language And Linguistics*. New York: Cambridge UP, 2010.
- latefl Scholarship Winners/ Brighton online. 10 April. 2012 <<http://iatefl.britishcouncil.org/2011/tate...>>
- Kaleissin. Phonotactics.<<http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phonotacts>>Phonotactis. Wikipedia, free encyclopedia, 10 April. 2012 <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wik/phonotactics>>
- Profile of Anita Tamuli.10 April. 2012 <<http://www.gauhati.ac.in/./staffdetails.php>>
- Sethi, J., P.V. Dhamija. *A Course in Phonetics and Spoken English*. New Delhi: Prentice' Hall of India, 2002.
- Tamuli, Anita. " Contrastive Phonotactics of Consonants in English and Assamese." *Indian Linguistics*. Vol.72. No.1- 4. (2011): 243-256.