

A Comparative Phonology of the A·we and Chibok Varieties of Garo

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Abstract

This study presents a comparative phonological analysis of the A·we and Chibok varieties of the Garo language. The study aims to identify and compares the vowel and consonant inventories, syllable structures, consonant clusters, and a major phonological correspondences between the two varieties. The data were collected through structured and unstructured interviews, observation, and audio recordings of native speakers. The collected lexical items were analysed using FLEEx 9.0 and Phonological Assistant, with the data transcribed using the International Phonetic Alphabet. The findings shows that both the A·we and Chibok share some phonological similarities and dissimilarities.

Keywords: A·we, Chibok, Variety, Phonology, Consonant, Vowel, Syllable Structure, Cluster.

1. Introduction

1.1. Brief description of the Garos

The Garos are one of the major indigenous communities of Northeast India, with a significant presence in the state of Meghalaya, and smaller populations in Assam, Tripura, Nagaland and parts of Bangladesh. Garo language is spoken by the people called the ‘A·chik’ or hillmen and ‘Mande’ meaning ‘man or human being’ who are concentrated in the western part of Meghalaya, named after them as the Garo Hills, and in the adjoining areas of Assam, Bangladesh and Tripura.

The history and origin of the Garos are still unknown. But according to some traditional story, it is believed that the Garos have migrated from Tibet. According to Marak (1930), under the leadership Jappa Jalimpa and Sukpa Bonggepa, the Garos have migrated in search of new land. The Garos’ migration history, preserved orally and documented by scholars like Jobang D. Marak (1930), Dewansing S. Rongmuthu (1967), Mihir N. Sangma (1993) and Milton S. Sangma (1983), recounts their origins in Tibet.

The Garo people follow a matrilineal system, where lineage and inheritance are traced through mother’s line. Property, particularly land, is traditionally passed down to the youngest daughter, known as ‘Nokna’, who become the custodian of the household. The Garos traditionally practiced jhum cultivation for living. When years had passed, many have transitioned to small business, carpenter, mason, and government employment. Festival and rituals related to the agricultural activities plays a crucial role in the social life of the community. Historically, the Garos followed their indigenous religion, known as ‘Songsarek’ and ritual practices strongly tied to agricultural cycles. Around the late 19th centuries, Christianity spread among the Garos. Today, majority of the Garos are Christian, and church plays a major role in education and linguistic standardisation.

The Garos do not have their own orthography. At the end of the 19th century, some Christian missionaries used to write the Garo language in the Bengali script, but later on, American Baptist missionaries and the British government decided to change it to the Roman script since 1902.

1.2. The Garo language

The Garo language is spoken by the Garo people inhabiting the western part of Meghalaya, some parts of Assam, Nagaland, Tripura and Mymensingh district of Bangladesh. Traditionally, the Garos practices the matrilineal culture. The Garo language has many varieties. According to some scholars and linguists such as Grierson (1903), Burling (1961), Playfair (1909), and Sangma (1983), the Garo language has eleven varieties namely A·we, Chisak, Dual, Matchi, Matjangchi or Matabeng, Am·beng or A·beng, Chibok, Ruga, Gara Gan·ching, A·we and Me·gam. Later, another variety has been discovered, that is, Kamrupia, spoken in Kamrup district of Assam.

1.2.1. The A·wes

The A·we is spoken in the northern and northeastern parts of the Garo Hills and the lowest hills adjacent to the plains in the Kamrup and Goalpara districts of Assam. Some of the important villages like Bajengdoba, Berubari, Resu, Mendi, Dilma, and Damas are inhabited by the speakers of this variety. A large number of A·we speakers are found in the Goalpara district of Assam. From the southeast border of the Goalpara district, the A·we inhabited the area extending up to Jugigopa near Goalpara town and Budalong near Rongjuli in the east. The A·we is considered a standard language among the Garos since 1902. It is used for official purposes, in church and in educational institutions. The term 'A·we' is used for both people and the variety. The primary reason for the standardisation of A·we is that the British officers and American Baptist missionaries first came in contact with the A·we speakers. The first language the British officers and American missionaries learned from the Garo people was the A·we variety. To use in schools or to preach the gospel, the missionaries start writing books in the A·we variety, first using the Bengali script and later moving on to the Roman script. School primers, readers, grammars, books on other subjects, hymns, translations of the Bible, journals or periodical writings and other secular writings were written in A·we. Since then, A·we has been used as the standard variety among the Garos, and A·we is the lingua franca of the Garo community for formal communication. However, the Garos used their own variety to communicate in informal situations, but the A·we is used as the medium of instruction and mostly used in Garo literature or any written work done in the Garo language.

1.2.2. The Chiboks

The Chiboks settled near the Bugi River in the centers of A·beng, Ruga, Gara Gan·ching, and Matabeng. The Chibok speaking villages falls under the Chokpot Development Block. Majority Chibok speaking villages are Renggua, Karawen, Dompai, Galwanggitok, Rangmai Aruak, Bolchimda, Bakata, etc. They are mutually unintelligible to other Garo speaking varieties. They followed the same matrilineal society as other Garos. Traditionally, the Chiboks celebrate the post funeral ceremony like other groups, Atong and Ruga. According to one of the consultant, there is a traditional tale regarding to the origin of the Chibok. In ancient times, the Chibok people were said to live in isolation, avoiding unity and social interaction with other community. They refused to listen to advice from others or even from their own elders, and choose instead to act independently. Their behavior was often described as harsh and unkind toward other people. It is said that whenever someone approached them politely, the Chibok people would react aggressively and raise their voices in protest and the white saliva would come out of their

mouths as they shouted. Because of this distinctive behavior, some neighboring communities began to refer to them as Chibok, where *chi* means ‘saliva’ and *bok* means ‘white.’

2. Genetic classification of the Garo

Garo language has been genetically classified by different scholars and linguists in different ways. According to Grierson (1903), Garo language is a section of the Bodo-Garo group of languages, in which, Bodo-Garo is a branch of Tibeto-Burman group of languages. Tibeto-Burman is a family of Tibeto-Chinese speech family. Grierson has classified the Garo language under the Bodo-Garo group of languages along with other related languages. The generic name ‘Bodo’ was first applied by Brian Hodgson to the group of languages that comprised Bara Kachari, Garo, Dimasa, Rabha, Mech, Lalung, Koch, Riang, Chutiya and Tripuri (pp. 1-2).

According to Benedict (1972), the Garo language comes under the group of Bodo-Garo, which, in turn, Bodo-Garo is a sub group of Kachin group of languages, whereas Kachin comes under the category of Tibeto-Burman. Tibeto-Burman is a section of Tibeto-Karen, which, in turn, Tibeto-Karen is a group of Sino-Tibetan group of languages. Benedict also proposed an internal classification of the Garo language, dividing it into two branches: Garo A (comprising Rabha, Ruga, and A·we) and Garo B (including A·beng, A·chik, and A·we). Although this division was later challenged—most notably by Burling (2017), who questioned the inclusion of A·we and Ruga within Garo— it represented an early and influential attempt to recognize internal linguistic diversity within Garo related speech communities.

Robbins Burling in his 1983 paper, *The Sal Languages*, defined the modern understanding of Garo’s genetic status. Burling confirmed the inclusion of Bodo-Garo, Jingpho, and Northern Naga as members of the Sal group, using the same lexical items like *sal* and *bwar* as evidence. However, he went further by offering a clearer internal structure of the group, placing Garo within the Bodo. Garo stayed along with Bodo, Dimasa, and Koch. Burling emphasized that genetic classification should be based on structural and lexical evidence, not on ethnic identity or colonial labels. He also rejected Benedict’s division of Garo into Garo A and B, arguing that A·we and Ruga are sister languages, not the varieties of Garo.

Many scholars and linguists agree with Burling’s classification and accept that Garo is a language descendant of the Bodo-Garo language subgroup. It can be considered that the Garo language belongs to Bodo-Garo language sub-group, which in turn, sub group of a Tibeto-Burman language family.

3. Review of literature

According to Sangma (1983), first and foremost, John Eliot, the Commissioner of Dacca, collected Garo vocabulary during his official deputation to the Garo Hills in 1788-1789. His findings were later published in *Asiatic Researches*, Volume III (1799), under the title *Observations on the Inhabitants of the Garrow Hills* (Sangma, 1983, p. 22). From that time, the other scholar also started to work on the Garo language. When the century had passed, the Christian missionaries published many books, but there are none which are based on linguistic studies.

Grierson (1903) in his book, *Linguistic Survey of India, Vol. III, Part II* states that the Garo language is a section of the Bodo-Garo group of languages, in which Bodo-Garo is a branch of the Tibeto-Burman group of languages. Tibeto-Burman is a family of the Tibeto-Chinese speech family. Grierson has classified the Garo language under the Bodo-Garo group of languages along with other related languages. The generic name ‘Bodo’ was first applied by Brian Hodgson to the group of languages that

comprised Bara Kachari, Garo, Dimasa, Rabha, Mech, Lalung, Koch, Rieng, Chutiya and Tripuri (pp. 1-2).

Burling (1961) made a major contribution to Garo linguistic studies through his work *A Garo Grammar*. This book offers a detailed account of Garo phonology, morphology, and syntax.

Duanmu (1994) in his article, *The Phonology of the Glottal Stop in Garo* which appeared in *Linguistics of the Tibeto-Burman Area* 17:2, states that the Garo /ʔ/ is not a tonal feature. Based on the description made by Burling's article, *Garo as a Minimal Tone Language*, Duanmu highlighted the independent features of the glottal stop and tone. He further clarifies that the glottal phoneme /ʔ/ is related to the constriction of the glottis, whereas tone is related to the tenseness or thickness of the vocal folds.

Singh & Lyngdoh (2013) in *Linguistic Ecology: Meghalaya* collected the several articles based on the linguistic studies of Meghalaya's languages. Marak contributed the article in this book, entitled *Linguistic Ecology of Garo Language* (pp. 130-156), where the author describes the current scenario of the Garo language.

In a book, *PLSI Vol. 19th, Part II: The Languages of Meghalaya*, Devy and Syiem (2014) explore all the languages and their varieties. They started with the introduction to both the Khasi and Garo languages. In this book, the Chibok variety of the Garo language has been explored. Their main focus is to collect the lexical items of each variety. They compare the lexical items of both the varieties with the standard variety of the Garo, that is, A·we.

Marak (2018), in her book *Studies on Garo and Its Cognate Language*, collected the several articles on the Garo language and its cognates written by different authors. In the same book, Angela Ingti contributed the article entitled *A Phonetic and Phonological Description of A·chik (Garo) Language* (pp. 26-40), which gives a detailed description of the sound system in the Garo language. According to the author, the Garo language has eighteen (18) consonantal phonemes, six (6) vowel phonemes, eleven (11) diphthongs, and one (1) triphthong.

Sangma (2020), in her unpublished PhD titled *A Comparative Phonological Study of A·we, Am·beng and Atong Varieties of Garo*, compares the phonological features in those three varieties of the Garo language. Throughout her work, the author discovered that both A·we and Am·beng have 17 consonant phonemes and 6 vowel phonemes, while Atong has 21 consonantal phonemes and 7 vowel phonemes.

Marak (2025), in her article, *Documentation of the Chibok Variety of the Garo Language*, documented the Chibok language. This documentation focuses on the structural features that define the variety, such as phonology, morphology, sentence structures, and the comparison with A·we, the standard variety. According to the author, the Chibok has 18 consonants, 6 vowels and 3 diphthongs like 'A·we'.

4. Methodology

While collecting the data, interviews are conducted, both structured and unstructured interviews. The researcher asked the native speakers to respond to the questions accordingly. The researcher asked the speakers from the wordlist, and beside these, an unstructured interview is conducted to gather more information about the language and their socio-cultural background. Besides interviews, the observation method is conducted while the native speakers are speaking and having conversations with each other. The researcher observes how they speak and how they pronounce, and tries to figure out if there is any tone or stress in their language or not. The recording method is conducted to gather the data. The researcher records the data using modern recording equipment. The researcher asked the native speakers to speak the word three times. This method is done for all the gathered data. Another method is that

entering the wordlist in FLEEx is done. The aim is to analyse the data using the modern technological language software.

While collecting the data, the researcher used many tools during the fieldwork. For a phonological research, the wordlist is very crucial to all the researchers. The wordlist is prepared before the fieldwork research. Other tools, like recording equipment, are used for gathering the data. For analysing the data, the researcher uses the language software like FLEEx 9.0. All the lexical items were entered in FLEEx 9.0 using the International Phonetic Alphabet symbol. To find out the phonemes of the selected languages, the researcher uses the Phonological Assistant software. The researcher identified the phonemes, minimal pairs, syllable structure, and clusters by using the Phonological Assistant. While analyzing the data, the International Phonetic Alphabet will be used for transcribing the data.

5. Phonological Description of A·we

5.1. Vowel inventory

Vowels are the speech sounds produced without making any closure in the vocal tract and allowing air to flow freely through the mouth. In A·we, there are six (6) monophthongs /i/, /e/, /a/, /i/, /u/, and /o/, and four (4) diphthongs /ai/, /ao/, /oi/, and /au/ have been discovered. The table for the vowel in A·we will be illustrated in below:

	Front	Central	Back
Close	i	i	u
Mid	e		o
Open		a	

5.2. Consonant phonemes

In A·we, there are eighteen (18) consonantal phonemes have been discovered. They are given in the following which shows their respective places and manner of articulation, and other phonetic properties.

Place of articulation	Bilabial	Alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Manner of articulation					
Plosive	p ^h b	t ^h d		k ^h g	ʔ
Nasal	m	n		ŋ	
Fricative		s			h
Affricate		ts dz			
Tap		r			
Approximant		l	j	w	

5.2.2. Place of articulation

The names of the place of articulation are assigned based on the names of the speech organs. They are bilabial, labio-dental, dental, alveolar, palatal, velar, pharyngeal, glottal, etc. In A·we, only bilabial, alveolar, velar and glottal sounds have been found. In A·we, bilabial sounds are [p^h], [b], and [m]; alveolar sounds are [t^h], [d], [n], [r], [s], [l], [ts], and [dz]; palatal sound is /j/ only; velar sounds are [k^h], [g], [ŋ] and [w]; and the two glottal sounds are [ʔ] and [h] phonemes.

5.2.3. Manner of articulation

Manner of articulation is the way how a speech sound is produced. The name of the manner of articulations are plosive, nasal, fricative, affricate, tap, trill, lateral and median approximant, but the manner of articulation found in A·we are plosive, nasal, fricative, affricate, tap and approximant. In A·we, plosive sounds are [p^h], [b], [t^h], [d], [k^h], [g] and [ʔ]; nasal sounds are [m], [n], and [ŋ]; fricative sounds are [s], and [h]; [ts] and [dz] are the two affricate sounds; phoneme [r] is the only tap sound, and the approximants are [l], [j] and [w].

Consonant cluster refers to the sequence of adjacent consonants. In A·we, there are some consonant cluster, or a series of consonant within vowels. For examples, /brak/, /grao/, /sp^hin/, etc. These kind of clusters are allowed in A·we, and that too in initial position of the syllable of a word.

Based on the collected data, there are nine (9) consonant phonemes which can occur as the first member of the cluster in A·we, and they are /p^h/, /b/, /t^h/, /d/, /k^h/, /g/, /ts/, /dz/, and /s/. All these consonant phonemes can occur with the voiced alveolar tap /r/ phoneme as in the following examples:

/p ^h /	/p ^h rap/	‘banyan’	/p ^h ai.p ^h rot/	‘Red vented bulbul’
/b/	/bri/	‘four’	/breŋ.a/	‘steam in bamboo’
/t ^h /	/meʔ.t ^h ra/	‘same age’	/t ^h ro/	‘same age’
/d/	/di.dram/	‘river bank’	/drak.k ^h a/	‘grape’
/k ^h /	/k ^h roŋ/	‘pillar, post’	/mak.k ^h re/	‘monkey’
/g/	/groŋ.a/	‘meet’	/greŋ/	‘bone’
/ts/	/tsra/	‘maternal uncle’	/tsrok.a/	‘to dance’
/dz/	/dzro.a/	‘to swim’	/dzrim.a/	‘heavy’
/s/	/sroŋ.a/	‘straight’	/sre/	‘tongue’

In A·we language, /r/ phoneme precedes the other consonant to make a cluster. Based on these, it can be concluded that the A·we variety permits the consonant cluster. Except /r/ phoneme, all the voiceless aspirated plosive sounds also precedes /s/ phoneme to create a cluster like /sp^h/, /st^h/, and /sk^h/. For details, the examples will be given in the following.

/sp ^h /	/sp ^h in/	‘sesame’	/sp ^h ak.a/	‘astringent’
/st ^h /	/st ^h ap.a/	‘to stick’	/st ^h u.a/	‘to spit’
/sk ^h /	/sk ^h al/	‘vampire, demon’	/sk ^h o/	‘head’

There are some phonological rules in A·we. In A·we, the /ŋ/ phoneme never comes in initial position, and all the voiced consonant phonemes never occur in final positions except the lateral approximant /l/. A·we permits the /r/ sound to create a cluster like /sr/, /p^hr/, etc., but not /rs/, /rp^h/ as a cluster.

5.3. Syllable structure

According to Crystal (1985), “Syllable is a unit of pronunciation typically larger than a single sound and smaller than a word” (p. 467). Syllable structure is the organisation of consonants and vowels within a syllable in a language, and commonly known as CV structure. CV structure in Chibok are illustrated below:

Syllable Structure	A·we	Gloss
VC	[ok]	‘stomach’
CV	[mai]	‘what?’
CVC	[mat]	‘squirrel’
CCV	[sre]	‘tongue’
CCVC	[p ^h riŋ]	‘morning’

The analysis of syllable structures in A·we shows that the language permits a five syllable patterns namely, VC, CV, CVC, CCV, and CCVC. Among these, CV structure appears to be the most common and basic pattern in A·we. In A·we, /r/ and voiceless aspirated plosives /p^h, t^h, k^h/ are the possible second C in consonant cluster.

6. Phonological Description of Chibok

6.1. Vowel Inventory

A vowels can also be divided into two types-monophthong and diphthong. Monophthong is the single unit of vowel sound, while diphthong is the gliding of two vowels consider as a single vowel. In Chibok, there are six (6) monophthongs /i/, /e/, /a/, /i/, /u/, and /o/, and five (5) diphthongs /ai/, /ao/, /oi/, /eu/ and /au/ have been discovered. The table for the vowel in Chibok will be illustrated in below:

	Front	Central	Back
Close	i	ɪ	u
Mid	e		o
Open		a	

6.2. Consonant Phonemes

In Chibok, there are eighteen (17) consonantal phonemes have been discovered. They are given in the following which shows their respective places and manner of articulation, and other phonetic properties.

Place of articulation →	Bilabial	Alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Manner of articulation ↓					
Plosive	p ^h b	t ^h d		k ^h g	ʔ
Nasal	m	n		ŋ	
Fricative		s			h
Affricate		ts dz			
Tap		r			
Approximant		l		w	

The place of articulation and manner of articulations are same with A·we variety. The Chibok does not permit /j/ phoneme.

7. Comparative Analysis

7.1. Comparison of Consonant Phonemes

The consonantal chart of A·we shows that the A·we has 18 (eighteen) consonantal phonemes, while the consonantal phonemes of Chibok shows that the Chibok has 17 (seventeen) consonantal phonemes. The consonantal phonemes discovered in A·we are /p^h/, /b/, /t^h/, /d/, /k^h/, /g/, /ʔ/, /m/, /n/, /ŋ/, /s/, /h/, /ts/, /dz/, /r/, /l/, /j/, and /w/. On the other hand, the consonantal phonemes found in Chibok are /p^h/, /b/, /t^h/, /d/, /k^h/, /g/, /ʔ/, /m/, /n/, /ŋ/, /s/, /h/, /ts/, /dz/, /r/, /l/, and /w/. The major differences is that the Chibok do not

have voiced palatal approximant or semi-vowel /j/ phoneme, on the other hand, this phoneme is occurs in A·we. Except /j/ phoneme, all the other phonemes found in A·we are present in the Chibok as well. The difference and similarities can be further explained in the manner of articulation in the following:

7.1.1. Plosives

Both the A·we and Chibok varieties have seven (7) plosive phonemes. A·we has three voiceless aspirated plosive sounds, and Chibok also shares the same sounds: /p^h/, /t^h/, and /k^h/. For bilabial plosives, they share the same phonemes /p/, /p^h/ and /b/; for alveolar, both varieties have /t/, /t^h/ and /d/; for velar, both varieties have /k/, /k^h/ and /g/; and for glottal, they have /ʔ/ in both varieties. The aspirated voiceless phonemes /p^h/, /t^h/ and /k^h/ have allophonic variations. All three phonemes become unaspirated when they come in the syllable final position preceded by the vowel in the next syllable, and these phonemes are unreleased when they come in the syllable final position of a word.

7.1.2. Fricatives

Both A·we and Chibok share same phonemes for fricatives. A voiceless alveolar /s/ and voiceless glottal /h/ occur in both varieties and appear in syllable initial position in both the A·we and Chibok varieties.

7.1.3. Affricates

There are two affricate sounds discovered in A·we and Chibok respectively, they are voiceless alveolar /ts/ and voiced alveolar /dz/. Both of these sounds can appear in the syllable initial position in both A·we and Chibok.

7.1.4. Nasals

A·we and Chibok have three nasal sounds, i.e., voiced bilabial nasal /m/, voiced alveolar nasal /n/ and voiced velar nasal /ŋ/. The two nasal phonemes /m/ and /n/ can occur in all three positions of syllables, that is, syllable initial, medial and final, but /ŋ/ can come only in the syllable final position in both the A·we and Chibok varieties.

7.1.5. Tap

Both A·we and Chibok varieties have one voiced alveolar tap sound /ɾ/ which is occurs in syllable initial position, and did not occurs in final syllable position. In both the varieties, /ɾ/ is occurs in cluster position to create a consonant cluster with another consonant phonemes.

7.1.6. Lateral Approximant

In both the varieties, there is one voiced alveolar lateral /l/. This phoneme is found in the syllable initial and final positions in both the varieties. In A·we, this phoneme is rare in initial position of a syllable, but in Chibok it occurs in many syllable initial position of a words.

7.1.7. Semi-vowels

Semi-vowels /w/ and /j/ are found in the A·we variety, while in Chibok, only the single semi-vowel is found, that is, /w/. In Chibok, the researcher does not find any voiced palatal semi-vowel sound /j/ in Chibok. This is the major difference between A·we and Chibok.

7.2. Vowels

7.2.1. Monophthongs

Altogether, there are six monophthongs in both A·we and Chibok, and they shared the same monophthongs. The monophthongs found in A·we and Chibok are /i/, /e/, /a/, /ɪ/, /u/, and /o/.

7.2.2. Diphthongs

The A·we has four diphthongs such as /ai/, /au/, /ao/, and /oi/, on the other hand, the Chibok has five diphthongs such as, /ai/, /au/, /ao/, /eu/, and /oi/. In A·we, the diphthong /oi/ most probably occurs in loa-

nwords. In Chibok, almost all the words have diphthongs, and the /oi/ occurs in native words.

7.3. Consonant cluster

In A·we, the phoneme /r/ always comes after some consonants to create a cluster like /sr/, /gr/, /br/, /pr/ and so on. In the same way, aspirated voiceless plosive consonants like /p^h/, /t^h/, and /k^h/ also precede voiceless fricative alveolar /s/ to make a cluster like /sp^h/, /st^h/, and /sk^h/ in A·we. Chibok also follows the same structures as A·we. It also creates a cluster with voiced alveolar tap /r/ and other consonants, and all the aspirated voiceless plosive sounds are also followed by the /s/ phoneme, like A·we, to create a cluster.

7.4. Syllable structure

Based on the data analysed, it has been found that the canonical shape of the syllable structure in both A·we and Chibok is (C) V (C). This means that the syllable structure in the A·we and Chibok varieties is composed of optional onsets and optional codas. However, a vowel is obligatory and explains that the words in both the varieties cannot be formed without a vowel. Both A·we and Chibok has five syllable structures namely, CV, VC, CVC, CCV, and CCVC. In both the varieties, the second C is /r/ and voiceless aspirated plosives /p^h, t^h, k^h/.

7.5. Phonological comparison between A·we and Chibok

7.5.1. Vowel correspondences

Crystal (1985) clearly defines, “Diphthongization is the term used to describe a process where a monophthong has become a diphthong” (p. 146). It is a phonetic process where the single vowel evolves into gliding vowel. While comparing the two varieties- A·we and Chibok, it has been observed that the Chibok permits diphthongization. Mostly, the A·we’s monophthongs corresponds with the diphthongs in Chibok. The following tables are the examples where monophthongs changes to diphthongs:

A·we /o/ corresponds to Chibok /au/: In A·we, the words with /o/ is corresponds to /au/ in Chibok, especially in naming the bird category. Such correspondences will be shown in the following with an appropriate examples:

A·we	Chibok	Gloss
[doʔtsok]	[dauʔtsok]	‘sparrow’
[doʔnok]	[dauʔnok]	‘domestic bird’
[doʔbit ^h ip]	[dauʔbit ^h ip]	‘bird nest’

A·we /e/ corresponds to Chibok /ai/: A monophthong /e/ in A·we corresponds to /ai/ in Chibok, and it can be seen in the following examples:

A·we	Chibok	Gloss
[meron]	[mairon]	‘uncooked rice’
[bebe]	[baibai]	‘truth’
[bit ^h e]	[bit ^h ai]	‘fruit’

A·we /o/ corresponds to Chibok /ao/: The monophthong /o/ in A·we corresponds to /ao/ in Chibok. This kind of changes will be illustrated with the examples in the following:

A·we	Chibok	Gloss
[mengo]	[mengao]	‘cat’
[huro]	[hurao]	‘hoolock gibbon’
[gro]	[grao]	‘length’

[bano] [banao] 'where?'

7.5.2. Chibok /h/ corresponds to A·we /Ø/

There is correspondence between /h/ and /Ø/ in both A·we and Chibok. If any words starts with the vowel /a/ in A·we, it is always corresponds with /h/ in Chibok at the initial position. For further explanation, the examples will be given in the following:

A·we	Chibok	Gloss
[aʔbri]	[haʔbri]	'hill, mountain'
[aʔa]	[haʔa]	'land, earth'
[aʔgilsak]	[haʔgilsak]	'world'
[oʔe]	[hoʔe]	'yes'

It can be observed that /h/ in Chibok corresponds to zero phoneme /Ø/ in A·we.

7.5.3. A·we /k^h/ corresponds to Chibok /g/

Sometimes, /k^h/ in A·we corresponds to /g/ in Chibok at some cases. A voiceless sounds become voiced sounds. For examples,

A·we	Chibok	Gloss
[basako]	[basgao]	'when'
[meʔrakk ^h u]	[mairagu]	'corn'

In the above analysis, /k/ and /k^h/ in A·we corresponds to /g/ in Chibok. Another observation is that /o/ corresponds to /ao/, and /e/ corresponds to /ai/ in Chibok, which are studied in earlier section.

7.5.4. A·we /i/ corresponds to Chibok /o/

In some cases, A·we /i/ corresponds to Chibok /o/. The examples of this correspondences will be illustrated with the examples in the below:

A·we	Chibok	Gloss
[gittsi]	[gottsi]	'a small hoe'
[gipok]	[gopok]	'white'
[mikrin]	[mikron]	'eye'
[tsimoŋa]	[tsomoŋa]	'to collect'

It can be observed that the high central unrounded vowel /i/ in A·we corresponds to mid back rounded vowel /o/ in Chibok.

7.5.5. A·we /i/ corresponds to Chibok /e/

Again, the high central unrounded vowel /i/ in A·we corresponds to mid open unrounded vowel /e/ in Chibok. For further explanation, the examples will be highlighted in the following:

A·we	Chibok	Gloss
[siniŋa]	[seneŋa]	'to learn, follow'
[ariŋga]	[areŋga]	'alligator'
[gominda]	[gomenda]	'pumpkin'

It is observed that in some cases, the A·we /i/ vowel corresponds to Chibok /o/ vowel.

7.5.6. A·we /i/ corresponds to Chibok /u/

There is a correspondences between A·we /i/ and Chibok /u/. For further detail explanation, the examples will be analysed in below:

A·we	Chibok	Gloss
[saŋk ^h ini]	[saŋk ^h uni]	'giant serpent'
[aguk]	[agik]	'grasshoper'

[gume]

[gimi]

‘brother in law’

It can be observed that the correspondences between /i/ and /o/ in A·we and Chibok are corresponds to each other in opposite direction. A·we /i/ becomes /u/ in Chibok, and Chibok /u/ becomes /i/ in A·we in some cases.

7.5.7. Cluster simplification in Chibok

In some conditions, a consonant cluster corresponds to vowel insertions in Chibok. This means that the vowel will be inserted between the two adjoining consonants instead of a cluster in another variety. For a further detailed explanation, the examples will be given in the following:

A·we	Chibok	Gloss
[gron]	[goron]	‘seed’
[gri]	[giri]	‘nephew’
[bangriʔa]	[banguriʔa]	‘earthquake’
[gran]	[garan]	‘feather, wing’

In the given data, it can be observed that the consonant clusters /gr/ in A·we correspond to the vowel insertion in Chibok. The major thing is that only the consonant cluster with /gr/ corresponds with the vowel insertion. The quality of the inserted vowel is conditioned by the surrounding vowels, particularly by the vowel that follows the consonant cluster.

7.6. Tone in A·we and Chibok

Both the varieties-A·we and Chibok does not permits tone in their language. Burling (2004) say, “In addition to lacking tone, Garo lacks anything like the contrastive, or nearly contrastive, word stress of English. Garo has nothing that comes as close to a minimal pair as do English” (p. 58). In the present study, the researcher agrees with Burling and can say that both A·we and Chibok does not possesses a tone.

8. Discussion

The comparative analysis of A·we and Chibok demonstrates that the two varieties share a highly similar phonological system. The similarities are particularly evident in their consonant inventories, monophthong systems, syllable structures, consonant clusters, and the absence of contrastive tone. These shared features indicate a close phonological relationship between the two varieties.

The major difference is found in the consonant inventory. A·we has eighteen consonantal phonemes, whereas Chibok has seventeen. The difference is primarily due to the presence of the voiced palatal approximant /j/ in A·we, which is absent in Chibok. Apart from this phoneme, the two varieties A·we and Chibok share the same major consonantal phonemes, including plosives, nasals, fricatives, affricates, the alveolar tap /ɾ/, lateral /l/, and the approximant /w/. The similarity in the places and manners of articulation further demonstrates the close phonological relationship between them.

The vowel system also reveals both similarities and differences. Both A·we and Chibok possess the same six monophthongs /i, e, a, i, u, o/. However, Chibok has five diphthongs, while A·we has four. The additional /eu/ in Chibok and the frequent occurrence of diphthongs in Chibok suggest that vowel gliding and diphthongization are important characteristics of the Chibok variety. The correspondences between A·we monophthongs and Chibok diphthongs, such as A·we /e/ with Chibok /ai/ and A·we /o/ with Chibok /ao/ or /au/, demonstrate the systematic vowel developments between the two varieties.

Another major significant finding concerns the consonant correspondences. Chibok /h/ corresponds to zero in A·we in certain words, particularly where Chibok has /h/ in the initial position. There are also

cases where A·we /k^h/ corresponds to Chibok /g/. These correspondences indicate that the differences between the varieties are not random but they follow the identifiable phonological patterns.

The correspondence involving /i/ is particularly noteworthy; because A·we /i/ corresponds to different vowels in Chibok, including /o/, /e/, and /u/. This suggests that vowel correspondence between the two varieties is complex and cannot always be explained through a single regular change. The examples nevertheless demonstrate that the two varieties have undergone different phonological developments, while retaining considerable similarity in their basic vowel systems.

The study also shows that Chibok sometimes simplifies the consonant clusters through vowel insertion. For example, the A·we cluster /gr/ corresponds to forms such as /gor/ or /giri/ in Chibok. The inserted vowel appears to be conditioned by the surrounding vowel environment. This feature distinguishes Chibok from A·we and provides further evidence of phonological variation between the two varieties.

In terms of syllable structure, both A·we and Chibok permit CV, VC, CVC, CCV, and CCVC patterns. Therefore, the canonical syllable structure can be represented as (C)V(C), showing that the vowel is obligatory while the onset and coda are optional. Both varieties also permit consonant clusters in which /r/ and voiceless aspirated plosives occur in specific positions.

Finally, the study finds that neither A·we nor Chibok possesses contrastive tone. This study agrees with the earlier observation of Burling that Garo lacks a tonal system and does not have a strong contrastive word-stress system comparable to English. Thus, despite the phonological differences identified in the study, both the varieties retain a common structural foundation.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that A·we and Chibok are closely related varieties with substantial phonological similarities, but distinctive patterns of vowel correspondence, consonant distribution, and cluster formation. These differences are important for understanding the internal phonological diversity of Garo and provide a basis for further comparative study and dialectology research.

9. Conclusion

The present study has attempted to describe the phonological comparison of A·we and Chibok varieties of the Garo language. The study was undertaken to examine the phoneme inventories, phonological processes, syllable structures, phonotactic constraints, and lexical correspondences between the A·we and Chibok varieties of Garo. The data were collected from native speakers of A·we and Chibok through interviews, observation, recording, and phonological analysis.

The findings of the study reveals that both A·we and Chibok has six monophthongs, viz., /i, e, a, i, u, o/. However, the A·we has four diphthongs, whereas Chibok has five, with /eu/ occurring additionally in Chibok. In terms of consonants, A·we has eighteen consonantal phonemes, while Chibok has seventeen. The major difference is the presence of the voiced palatal approximant /j/ in A·we, which is absent in Chibok. Apart from this difference, the two varieties share almost the same consonantal system. The study discovers that the A·we and Chibok share a close phonological relationship and possess many common linguistic features. Both the varieties share a similar consonant inventories, share the same major classes of sounds. Both varieties also permit consonant clusters and exhibit the same basic syllable patterns, namely CV, VC, CVC, CCV, and CCVC. The canonical syllable structure in both varieties, A·we and Chibok, is (C)V(C). Chibok frequently introduces /h/ before word-initial vowels where A·we lacks such a consonant. The study also shows the several cases of vowel variation and diphthongisation in Chibok, where monophthongs in A·we correspond to the diphthongs in Chibok.

The findings indicate that many of the similarities between the two varieties result from their common historical origin within the Bodo-Garo subgroup of Tibeto-Burman languages, and both varieties comes under the Garo language. At the same time, geographical separation, language contact, and independent phonological developments have contributed to the emergence of distinctive features in Chibok.

The present study is limited to the phonological comparison of A·we and Chibok based on data collected from the selected villages and a small number of speakers. Therefore, future research may expand the scope by including a larger number of speakers from different geographical areas to provide a more comprehensive description of dialectal variation. Finally, neither A·we nor Chibok has contrastive tone. It can be concluded that the A·we and Chibok possess a closely related phonological structure but have developed distinctive phonological features. It can be said that the findings contribute to the understanding and documentation of the internal phonological diversity of the Garo language and provide a foundation for further comparative studies of Garo varieties in future.

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