# PHONOLOGICAL COMPARISON OF SELECT WORDS OF THE AALU KURUMBA AND IRULA LANGUAGES OF THE NILGIRIS

## Monisha R*

## Abstract

*This paper aims at under taking a comparative study of the phonological changes of vowels and consonants of Aalu Kurumba and Irula languages spoken in Nilgiri district of Tamil Nadu. The paper adopts descriptive and comparative approaches and study the vowel and consonant changes in the two languages.*

**Keywords:** Phonological Change, Vowels, Consonants.

## Introduction

Language is a system of conventional spoken symbols or written symbols employed by human beings as members of a social group and participants in its culture to express themselves. The functions of language include communication, the expression of identity, play, imaginative expression. Phonology is the core component of a language which studies speech sounds with reference to their distribution and patterning. A very brief explanation is that phonology is the study of sound structures in language, which is different from the study of sentence structures (syntax), word structures (morphology), or how languages change over time (historical linguistics). Phonology aims at discovering the principles that govern the way sounds are organized in languages and to explain the variations that occur. One can analyze an individual language to determine which sound units are used and which patterns they form, compare the properties of different sound systems, and work out hypotheses about the rules underlying the use of sounds in particular groups of languages. The present study aims at exploring the phonological change which is clearly explained by comparing the two phonological systems and the change in the words of a language by simply replacing a single phonemic sound/s. The change and distribution in the vowels and consonants in the Irula and the Aalu kurumba language spoken in Nilgiri district of Tamil Nadu is explained in a systematic manner.

* Bharathiar University, Coimbatore, India.

The Alu or Palu Kurumbas ('Alu' means milk in Kurumba language while as 'pal' means milk in Tamil) live in the south and southeastern slopes of Coonoor, Kotagiri, and Kundah Taluk. Traditionally the Kurumbas played the role of sorcerers and priests not only for their tribe but also for other Nilgiri tribes like the Badagas and Irulas. As such they were thought to be proficient in their work for which they were respected and even punished for being responsible for illness and death in other tribes, who believed that it was the spell of the Kurumba that was at work. It is even said that the Kurumbas derive their name from the Tamil word for mischief Kurumba. Even though their notorious reputation survives but their knowledge of medicinal plants is well acknowledged.

Irula, on other hand, is an aboriginal ethnic group of India. They inhabit the area of the Nilgiri mountains in the states of Tamilnadu and Kerala, India. A scheduled tribe, their population in this region is estimated at 25,000 people. People of Irula ethnicity are called Irular and speak Irula language, which belongs to the Dravidian family. Irular word in Tamil generally means, "dark people" but is it thought to be derived from a Malayalam root word 'Irul', which means "darkness". People belonging to the area mostly possess dark complexion. The Irular people live in two South Indian states -Tamil Nadu and Kerala. In Tamil Nadu, they live in the Nilgiris, Coimbatore, and Erode districts.  In Kerala, they live in the Palakkad district and Attapady and Walayar panchayats. Traditionally, the main occupation of the Irula people has been rat-catching and fishing. They also work as laborers (coolies) in the fields of landlords during the sowing and harvesting seasons or in the rice mills.

**Objectives**

The objectives of the study are:

1. To explore the common patterns between Kurumba and Irula language at the Phonological level.

2. To understand differences between the two languages at the phonological level.

3. To explore changes in the phonological pattern of the languages and to establish overall patterns between them.

**Methodology**

The present study employed descriptive and comparative methods in the study.

A comparative study has been made at the phonological levels of the Kurumba and Irula languages.

A well-designed questionnaire was employed as a research tool to achieve the objectives of the study. The questions were prepared by giving daily usage words, and the informants were asked to provide the words in their respective languages. The data was recorded using a recorder and a video recorder.

The data was collected from the Kurumba and Irula tribes of the Nilgiris district, particularly in the Baviyoor hamlet of Kurumba and the Kambiyoor hamlet of Irula.

**Data Analysis**

The data was transcribed and lates analyzed at the phonological level. It was then tabulated and each table was interpreted using phonological rules. The sound changes between the Irula and Kurumba languages and the place of occurrence of those changes are given table from below.

## TABLE-1
## Vowel Change

| Vowel changes | Initial | Medial | Final |
|---|---|---|---|
| i>a | itu>atu 'It' | kiradi>karadi 'Bear' | |
| u>i | | cunna>cinna 'Small' | mottecocu>mottecoci 'Cabbage' |
| | | kodume>kodime 'Terror' | ñeṇdu> ñeṇdi 'Crab' |
| | | kunnappa:>cinnappa 'Father's younger brother's wife' | |
| e>i | | | cade>cadi 'Flesh' |
| i>u | | anjike>anjuke 'Timidity' | |
| | | cikkura> cukkura 'Friday' | |
| i>i | ilu>ilu 'Pull' | | |
| i>i | iṭṭi>iṭṭi 'Spear' | | |
| | irumbu>irumbu 'Cough' | | |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **a>e** | | ca**d**e>ce**d**i 'Flesh' | ku:d**a**>gu:d**e** 'Bamboo basket' |
| | | ka**y**i>ke**y**i 'Hand' | kutir**a**>kutir**e** 'Horse' |
| | | ga**t**tu>ke**t**tu 'Net' | |
| | | ka**ḷ**ude>ke**ḷ**ude 'Donkey' | |
| **e>a** | | | koll**e**>kol**a** 'Ful' |
| | | | eṭṭ**e**>ecc**a** 'How |
| | | | ven**e**>enn**a:** 'Deceit' |
| **o>e** | | b**o**lle > v**e**lle 'White' | beṭṭ**o**>veṭṭ**e** 'Hunter' |
| **u>e** | | | kokk**u**>kokk**e** 'Crane' |
| **Long Vowel To Short Vowel** | | | |
| **a:>a** | **a:**rubatu>**a**rubatu 'Sixty' | | akk**a:**>akk**a** 'Wife's elder brother's wife' |
| | | | enn**a:**>enn**a** 'what' |
| **a:>u** | | unṭ**a:**tu>inṭ**u**ga:tu 'Squeeze' | a:r**a:**>a:r**u** 'Who' |
| **a:>i** | | matiy**a:**na>mad**i**na 'Afternoon' | |
| **Short Vowel To Long Vowel** | | | |
| **e>e:** | **e**na>**e:**na 'Dead Body' | b**e**ru>b**e:**ru 'Root' | muṭṭe>muṭṭe: 'Egg' |
| | | b**e**ra>b**e:**ra 'Grandson' | |
| | | b**e**tti>b**e:**tti 'Granddaughter' | |
| **Long Vowel To Long Vowel** | | | |
| **i:>e:** | **i:**ni>**e:**ni 'Ladder' | | |
| **e:>a:** | | m**e:**ka:la>m**a:**ka:la 'Rainy Season' | |
| | | b**e:**le>v**a:**le 'Banana Leaf' | |

**Table 1: Vowel change**

## Vowel Changes

Vowel changes which were found while analyzing the data from both the language are as follows:

- **I > a** The vowel sound "i" in Kurumba language changes to vowel sound "a" in the Irula language.
- **u > i** The vowel sound "u" in the Kurumba language changes to the vowel sound "i" in the Irula language.
- **e > i** The vowel sound "e" in Kurumba language changes to vowel sound "i" in the Irula language.
- **I > u** The vowel sound "i" in the Kurumba language changes to the vowel sound "u" in the Irula language.
- **ɨ > i** The vowel sound "ɨ" in Kurumba language changes to vowel sound "i" in the Irula language.
- **I > ɨ** The vowel sound "i" in Kurumba language changes to vowel sound "ɨ" in the Irula language.
- **a > e** The vowel sound "a" in Kurumba language changes to vowel sound "e" in the Irula language.
- **e > a** The vowel sound "e" in Kurumba language changes to vowel sound "a" in the Irula language.
- **o > e** The vowel sound "o" in Kurumba language changes to vowel sound "e" in the Irula language.
- **u > e** The vowel sound "u" in Kurumba language changes to vowel sound "e" in the Irula language.

## Long Vowel to Short Vowel

Change in the long vowels to short vowels can be shown as follows:

- **a: > a** The vowel sound "a:" in Kurumba language changes to vowel sound "a" in Irula language.

- **a: > u** The vowel sound "a:" in Kurumba language changes to vowel sound "u" in Irula language.

- **a: > i** The vowel sound "a:" in Kurumba language changes to vowel sound "i" in Irula language.

## Short Vowel to Long Vowel

The instances of change in the long short vowels to vowels is enlisted as following:

- **e > e:** The vowel sound "e" in Kurumba language changes to vowel sound "e:" in the Irula language.

## Long Vowel to Long Vowel

There were instances where change in long vowels to contrastive long vowels was observed, such instances are as following:

- **i: > e:** The vowel sound "i:" in Kurumba language changes to vowel sound "e:" in Irula language.
- **e: > a:** The vowel sound "e:" in Kurumba language changes to vowel sound "a:" in Irula language.

## Consonant Change

| Consonant changes | Initial | Medial | Final |
|---|---|---|---|
| **b>v** | **b**a:> **v**a: 'Come'<br><br>**b**a:ttu>**v**a:ttu 'Duck'<br><br>**b**ale>**v**ale 'Bracelet'<br><br>**b**e:ru>**v**e:ru 'Root'<br><br>**b**a:lu>**v**a:lu 'Tail'<br><br>**b**a:yi>**v**a:yi 'Mouth'<br><br>**b**ale>**v**ale 'Net' | - | - |
| **d>j** | - | mo**d**ale>mo**j**ale 'Crocodile' | - |
| **tt>cc** | - | e**tt**a>e**cc**a 'How' | - |
| **n>m** | - | ni**n**na>ni**m**ma 'Your' | - |
| **m>n** | **m**ega>**n**ega 'Antler' | - | - |
| **tt>d** | - | a:ruba**tt**u>arupa**d**u 'Sixty'<br><br>eluba**tt**u>eluva**d**u 'Seventy' | - |

| | | embattu>embadu 'Eighty' | |
| | | ombattu>ombadu 'Nine' | |
| t>d | - | intu>indu 'Today' | - |
| | | bu:ti>bu:di 'Ash' | |
| r>r̠ | - | a:ra:>a:r̠u 'Who' | - |
| | | a:ratu>a:r̠tu 'Whose' | |
| | | mu:ru>mu:r̠u 'Three' | |
| v>g | - | avve>agve 'Mother' | - |
| kk>cc | - | lakka>lacca 'One Lakh' | - |

**Consonants Changes**

In the present study number of Consonantal changes found while analyzing the Data from both the language, following are the instances where the change in the consonants was found.

- **b>v** The consonant 'b' in the Kurumba language changes to 'v' in the Irula language.

- **d>j** The consonant 'd' in the Kurumba language changes to 'j' in the Irula language.

- **tt>cc** The consonant 'tt' in the Kurumba language changes to 'cc' in the Irula language.

- **n>m** The consonant 'n' in the Kurumba language changes to 'm' in the Irula language.

- **m > n** The consonant 'm' in the Kurumba language changes to 'n' in the Irula language.

- **tt >d** The consonant 'tt' in the Kurumba language changes to 'd' in the Irula language.

- **t>d** The consonant 't' in the Kurumba language changes to 'd' in the Irula language.

- **r>r̠** The consonant 'r' in the Kurumba language changes to 'r̠' in the Irula language.

- **v>g** The consonant 'v' in the Kurumba language changes to 'g' in the Irula language.

- **kk>cc** The consonant 'kk' in the Kurumba language changes to 'cc' in the Irula language.

## Findings and Conclusion

This study discusses phonological changes in the Kurumba and Irula languages. The study identifies various types of vowel and consonant variations which occur in both the languages. While looking into the phonological changes the place of occurrence of the changes in vowels and consonants have been identified at initial, medial, and final levels.

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