Phonological system of Sheikha Gal (Watali)

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Abstract

The paper present the Phonological description of *Sheikha Gal (Watali)* with focus on the segmental part of the phonological system including consonants, vowels, diphthongs, syllables, including their distribution and arrangement in the language. The *Watal* or *Sheikhs* belong to a social segment of people who traditionally are assumed to belong to the lowest strata of the society.

Key words

Consonants, Vowels, Dipthongs, Consonant cluster, Syllable structure,

Introduction

Watali or *Sheikha Gal* is a language spoken by groups of people living in Srinagar, Uri, Sopore, Rajouri, Kupwara, Kulgam (KanThipora, Sher colony), Haihum, Bandipora, Tangamarg (Vogmun),Handawara, Drogmul, areas of Jammu and Kashmir, and as per their claims they number around 2,00,000 (The census records do not show them in a separate bracket). In Srinagar, they are mostly clustered around the foothills of Hari Parbat, a hillock in Srinagar. The speakers of this language are commonly called *Watal* (sing. *Watul)*, although they would prefer to be called *Sheikhs*. Watali/Sheikha Gal is an unclassified language and the name of this language or its speakers is not mentioned in the census.

Their origin is shrouded in mystery. One claim about their origin is that seven generations back they were basically the residents of Rawalpindi, Pakistan and after the attack by tribals there, they spread along different places. According to their claims this has happened around 7 generations back. After their migration, they did not have a permanent places to live and used to move from place to place. Their abode would usually be open fields *medaan* and this is the reason why they claim to be called Harmaadaani Sheikh (gypsies). However, this claim

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does not have any documentary evidence. The term *Watal* is first observed in the writings of Lawrence (1895) who refers to them as a wandering tribe, and according to him though sometimes a family will settle down in a village, and will build a permanent hut, the roving instinct is too strong, and after a few years, the family moves on. They are not considered very honest, and are much given to robbing hen-roosts (pp. 314-315). However, in the present days, instead of subscribing to their ancestral nomadic tradition, the Watal/Sheikhs have settled down.

The *Watal* or *Sheikhs* belong to a social segment of people who traditionally work as scavangers, cobblers, leather workers, makers of winnowing trays (*shup'*), brooms, etc. and because of their occupation, are assumed to belong to the lowest strata of the society. Though most of the *Sheikhs* still follow their traditional occupations, many of them have government jobs and also run small businesses of their own. Apart from their own language *Sheikha Gal* or *Watali*, these people are observed to be fairly proficient in Kashmiri and to some extent Urdu. However, they prefer to use *Sheikha Gal* (*Watali*) at their homes and among their community. However, in their language, there is a mixture of other languages such as Punjabi. Gojri, Dardi, Urdu, Kashmiri etc. This can be because of the fact they were not living at the permanent places, they were moving from place to place (gypsies) and people from other language groups were also living around and the language was influenced.

The name *Watul* (sing) or *Watal* (pl) is considered derogatory by them and they claim that the original name assigned to them was *watvun* 'those who do some job' which could be a politically correct way of addressing those who clean and dispose off dirt, filth and other unclean items. They are mainly classified into three categories on the basis of their occupation. Viz;

1. shuplr' Watal (those involved in the making of winnowing trays '*shup''*)
2. tshiints' Watal (Scavengers)
3. Kaashir Watal or Duvan Watal (Sweepers)

It appears that all the three groups were speaking Sheikha Gal in the beginning but the number of Kashir Watal or Duvan Watal (Sweepers) who speak Sheikha Gal is decreasing day by day.

Object of the Study

The paper presents the phonological description of *Sheikha Gal* (*Watali*) with focus on the segmental part of the phonological system including consonants, vowels, diphthongs, syllables, including their distribution and arrangement in the language.

Method

The methodology employed for this paper consisted of intensive fieldwork. The data has been taken from primary source using voice recorder from members of *ʃupir' Watal and tshi:nts' Watal* community.

Analysis

As already mentioned, the present paper focuses on the aspects of segmental phonology of *Sheikha Gal*.

Segmentals

The segmental inventory of Sheikha Gal (Watali) is observed to include 36 consonant sounds and 16 vowel sounds which are discussed below:

Consonants

The following table shows the distribution of consonants at initial, medial and final positions of words, where ever possible.

Phoneme	Initial	Medial	Final
Stops			
/p/	/pa:simul/ 'in front of me'	/ko:pi/ 'copy'	/top/ 'sunny'
/ph/	/phe:r/ 'repeat'	/phapha:/ 'stammerer'	/kaph/ 'to cut'
/b/	/biluva/ 'blue'	/khaba/ 'left handed'	/dab/ 'hit'
/bh/	/bharke/ 'full'	/rabhad/ 'rubber'	/labh/ 'wall'
/t/	/tad/ 'then'	/kotiyɛ/ 'to spin'	/bha:t/ 'rice'
/th/	/tho:li/ 'plate'	/ketha/ 'where'	/o:ṇith/ 'ɘnith'
/d/	/duvi hisa:bõ/ 'pregnant'	/a:da/ 'half'	/bad/ 'bad'
/dh/	/dho:nɛ/ 'to wash'	/ma:dha/ 'female'	/bondh/ 'anus'
/ḍ/	/ḍaḍ/ 'frog'	/ḍeḍa:r/ 'bee'	/bhe:ḍ/ 'goat'
/ṭ/	/ṭeḍi/ 'belly'	/pe:ṭka/ 'policeman'	/agan bo:ṭ/ 'houseboat'
/ṭh/	/ṭhola/ 'fat'	/ziṭhu/ 'Elder'	/aṭh/ 'eight'
/k/	/ke:/ 'what'	/tarakuḍu/ 'knife'	/nak/ 'nose'
/kh/	/kha:/ 'eat'	/okhiyã:/ 'eyes'	/brakh/ 'break'

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q	/qɨlæja/ 'liver'	/beqla:/ 'stupid'	/laq/ 'back'
g	/go:zriya:/ 'carrot'	/zo:giye/ 'lying in wait for someone or something'	/geg/ 'mouth'
gh	-	/khanghe/ 'knot (in wood)'	/khangh/ 'cough'
/ɣ/	-	/suya:ga/ 'ash'	/brag/ 'vulture'

Fricatives

/s/	/sĩh/ 'lion'	/kɔpse/ 'cutting'	/sas/ 'mother in law'
/ʃ/	/ʃe:kh/ 'a caste'	/kiʃmiʃ/ 'raisins'	/kaʃ/ 'throw'
/z/	/za:ta/ 'caste'	/ta:za/ 'fresh'	/na:z/ 'proud'
/h/	/hika:/ 'small'	/inhe:ri/ 'Darkness'	/gũh/ 'potty'
/v/	/vi:ʧĩye/ 'to sell'	/kuvoḍi/ 'axe'	/peiv/ 'father'

Affricates

/ts/	/tsadɨ/ 'bed bug'	/metsiti:l/ 'oil'	/nuts/ 'to stop leakage'
/tsh/	/tshɨh/ 'an expression used to move cattle'	/vetshur/ 'to forget'	/maka:nitsh/ 'in the house'
/ʧ/	/ʧaʧda:/ 'to go up'	/hoʧi/ 'rotten'	/moʧ/ 'very much'
/ʧh/	/ʧhaj/ 'winnowing tray'	/pəʧhu/ 'guest'	/koʧh/ 'talk'
/j/	/jaŋ/ 'leg'	/bo:jdi/ 'listening'	/ta:j/ 'cocks comb'
/jh/	/jhala/ 'mad'	/hajhan/ 'pilgrimage' *	/qəjh/ 'silent'

Nasals

/m/	/mi/ 'rain'	/bima:r/ 'ill'	/kram/ 'saag'
/n/	/nuh/ 'vapours'	/ja:ntra/ 'son in law'	/və:ra:n/ 'deserted'

/n̠/		-	/ju:ni/ 'wife'	/sibu:n̠/ 'soap'
/ŋ/		-	/naŋuy/ 'naked'	/raŋ/ 'colour'
Trills				
/r/	/rænda/ 'living'	/do:ra/ 'double folded'		/kha:r/ 'cointal'
Flaps				
/ɽ/		-	/kukṛi/ 'hen'	/guɽ/ 'milkman'
Laterals				
/l/	/le:ga bha:t/ 'half-cooked rice'	/pe:ʧhla/ 'previous'		/la:l/ 'red'
Semivowels				
/y/	/ya:khuda/ 'God'	/heya:/ 'this is'		/gəːy/ 'cow'

Table 1: Initial, medial and final positions of Consonants of Sheikha Gal

Based on the analysis of the distribution of consonantal segments, the following table represents the consonant sounds of Sheikha Gal on the basis of their place of articulation, manner of articulation and states of glottis:

Manner of Articulation		Place of Articulation							
		Bilabials	Labio dentals	Dentals	Palato-alveolars	Palatals	Velars	Uvulars	Glottals
Stops	Vl.unasp.	P		t	ṭ		k	q	
	Vl.asp.	ph/f		th	th		kh		
	Vd.unasp.	b		d	ḍ		g		
	Vd. asp.	bh		dh			gh		
Affricates	Vl.unasp.			ts		C			
	Vl.asp.			tsh		Ch			
	Vd.unasp.					J			
	Vd. asp.					Jh			
Fricatives	Vl.			s		ʃ	Γ		h
	Vd.		v	z					

Nasals		m		n	ɳ		ŋ		
Laterals				l					
Trills				r					
Flaps				ɽ					
Semi-vowels						Y			

Table 2: Consonant system of Sheikha Gal

Vowels:

The following table shows the distribution of Vowels of Sheikha Gal at initial, medial and final positions of words, where ever possible.

Phoneme	Initial	Medial	Final
/i/	/inu/ 'to this person'	/bima:r/ 'ill'	/kuḍi/ 'daughter'
/i:/	/i:d/ 'a Muslim festival'	/ki:ru/ 'well'	/miṭi:/ 'clay'
/e/{ɛ}	/ekh/ 'single'	/beḍo:l/ 'not looking good'	/me/ 'me'
/e/	/eʧa/ 'lift it'	/pɛʧhu/ 'guest'	/kha:de/ 'ate'
/e:/	/e:/ 'this'	/inhe:ri/ 'darkness'	/he:/ 'informal expression'
/æ/	-	/pæɳ/ 'sister'	-
/ɨ/	-	/tshɨh/ 'an expression used to move cattle'	/ma:nḍɨ/ 'knead'
/ə/	/əthri:/ 'moth'	/gəḍi/ 'vehicle'	/bulə/ 'person'
/ə:/	/ə:nṭi:/ 'stone of fruit'	/hə:ji/ 'a community of river and lake dwellers in Kashmir'	/pa:nDə:/ 'utensils'
/a/	/agan bo:ṭ/ 'house boat'	/saŋ/ 'throat'	/jha/ 'go'
/a:/	/a:nna/ 'get it'	/ja:na/ 'to go'	/okhiya:/ 'eyes'

/u/	/udji/ 'corridor'	/nuh/ 'vapours'	/oru/ 'better'
/u:/	/u:/ 'expression used while killing a louse'	/mu:tur/ 'urine'	/do:nu:/ 'churner'
/o/	/odurda/ 'flying'	/hondu/ 'tholi kaṭh'	/kha:dato 'did you eat'
/o:/	/o:pra/ 'stranger'	/alo:ntu/ 'hanging'	-
/ɔ/	/ɔkhul/ 'mortar'	/kɔkur/ 'cock'	-

Table 3. Initial, medial and final positions of Vowels of Sheikha Gal

On the basis of the analysis of the above mentioned examples, Shiekha Gal has 16 vowels which are arranged in a table below:

	Front		Central		Back	
	Short	Long	Short	Long	Short	Long
Close	I	i:	ɨ		U	u:
Half close	e (ɛ)	e:	ə	ə:	O	o:
Half open			a	a:	ɔ	
Open	æ					

Table 4: Vowel system of Sheikha Gal

Diphthongs:

Five diphthongs are observed in this language. These diphthongs are given below.

Diphthong	Example
/ai/	/lo:dai/ 'house'
/ei/	/peiv/ 'father'
/əu/	/vəul de/ 'barking of dogs'
/oi/	/hoiya/ 'is'
/ia/	/mo:ria/. 'to kill'

Table 5. Diphthongs of Sheikha Gal

Consonant clusters:

A consonant cluster is a combination of two or more consonants which are pronounced together. A language can have double (as in Kashmiri) or triple consonant clusters or both (as in English). In Sheikha Gal, only double consonant clusters (syllable based) are present which occur at initial positions only.

Initial consonant cluster: The first member of an initial cluster is either a stop, nasal or a fricative and second member is always a trill i.e. /r/. For example

Cluster	Example	'Gloss'
/tr/	/triya:/	'three'
/br/	/brankul/	'forest tree'
/gr/	/gra:û/	'village'
/pr/	/pra:v/	'brother'
/dr/	/drogu/	'costly'
/sr/	/srath/	' restlessness'
/kr/	/krupa:ll/	'tarpaulin'
/mr/	/mro:dɛ/	'twisted/unbalanced'

Table 6. Initial consonant clusters of Sheikha Gal

Syllable Structure:

A syllable is a group of one or more sounds. The essential part of a syllable is a vowel sound (V) which may be preceded and/or followed by a consonant (C) or a cluster of consonants (CC or CCC). The two main constituents within the syllable are *onset* and the *rhyme*. For example, in the word tip /Tip/ of English, the first segment is /T/ followed by the vowel /i/ and then another segment /p/. The segment /T/ constitutes the onset of the syllable, while the last two segments together /ip/ constitute the rhyme. The rhyme may be further divided into two constituents, the *nucleus* and the *coda*. For example, in the above word /Tip/, /T/ is the onset and /ip/ is a rhyme where /i/ is the nucleus (peak) and /p/ is the coda. A syllable which contains one or more consonants in the coda position is called a *closed syllable*, and a syllable which does not contain any consonants in the coda position is called an *open syllable*.

The following syllabic pattern is found in the language.

Syllable Structure	Example	'Gloss'
CVC	/kaph/	'to cut'
CVCCV	/hekhje/	'similar'
CCVC	/pra:v/	'brother'
CVCV	/pala:/	'dark'
CVCVC	/naɲuy/	'naked'
CV	/n'e/ {n'ɛ}	'in'

VCVCVCV	/atijoye/	'here'
CVCVCVCV	/peɟha:na:ye/	'back side'
V	/e:/	'an informal expression'
VC	/al/	'pumpkin'

Table 7. Syllabic pattern of Sheikha Gal

Conclusion:

The present paper presented the phonological description of *Sheikha Gal (Watali)* with focus on the segmental part of the phonological system including consonants, vowels, diphthongs and syllables. It is observed that the consonantal system is rich (consisting of 36 consonants) and both aspirated and unaspirated voiced stops are present. The basic syllable structure is of CVC type. The language possesses double consonant clusters (syllable based) at the initial positions of words. Medial consonant clusters (word based) are also found medially. This is a preliminary study and more work is required in this arena.

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