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## Vowel phonology of KUI language

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### Abstract

Kui (ISO639-3 Code 'Kxu') is a language spoken by Kondh or Kondha (/Kɔndʱɔ/) tribe. Majority of the Kui-speaking Kondhs live in the hilly and forested areas of South and central Odisha especially in the undivided districts of Kondhamal, Koraput and Kalahandi. The other language spoken by Kondhs is Kuvi which is very similar to Kui. Kondh people being an underdeveloped tribal people, study of their language, society and culture draws a lot of attention of academics, administration and other philanthropic agencies.

Other things may be pointed out that this language seems to be at a first rate of simplification, since some complex features of Kui phonology and semantics are losing their ground perhaps due to less frequent use and due to the influence of neighboring languages. This is evident from the difficulties and inconsistency in determining the proper meaning of some non-inflection morphemes. The case may be due to the rapid change of socio-economic, socio-political, educational and cultural values of Kondas because of their exposure to the modern Civilization. No doubt kui is a very nice language.

The objective of this study is to present the vowel sound and phonology of Kui language. The approach is data oriented and uses in general. The structuralist methodology has been followed for the analysis of the data in the present work. Data was collected from the native speakers through field visit to various Kui speaking areas.

**Keywords:** Kui, vowel, central Dravidian, non-nasalized, nasalized, front, central, back, low, mid, high, segmental sound

### Introduction

#### Kui language

Odisha is a land of many languages. Languages belonging to three distinct language families are spoken in this state. Apart from Odia, the major languages, around 46 tribal languages are spoken in Odisha. Many of the speakers know more than one language. According to the 2001 census the total population of Odisha is 36804660. In the language census report it is clearly mentioned that the total Odia speaking population is 30563507, this is 83.04% of the total population of Odisha. Under the tribal language population census report, in 2001 there are 916222 speakers in the Kui language. Kui is the language of Kondh tribes. It is the most popular tribal language in Phulbani (Kondhamal), Boudh, Koraput, Kalahandi, Rayagada, Nayagarh, Ganjam, Gajapati, Nabarangpur, Sonepur, Angul and Dhenkanal district of Odisha.

Kui (ISO639-3 Code 'Kxu') is a language spoken by Kondh or Kondha (/Kɔndʱɔ/) tribe. Majority of the Kui-speaking Kondhs live in the hilly and forested areas of South and central Odisha especially in the undivided districts of Kondhamal, Koraput and Kalahandi. The other language spoken by Kondhs is Kuvi which is very similar to Kui. Kondh people being an underdeveloped tribal people, study of their language, society and culture draws a lot of attention of academics, administration and other philanthropic agencies.

Linguistically, the Kondhs are divided into two groups, the Kui Kondh and the Kuvi Kondhs. The Kutia Kondhs found in the Muniguda, Nayagarh, Boudh, Ganjam, Phulbani (Kondhamal), G. Udyagiri and Bolangir regions, are said to speak the Kui dialect, while the Kondhs found in the Nabarangpur, Narayan Patna, Kasipur, Kalyansinghpur, Rayagada and Laximpur subdivisions speak Kuvi. But the Kondhs themselves say that they speak only one language. Although they are aware of some lexical differences between Kui and Kuvi, but it is the same language to them. This is reflected in the census return also.

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**Objective of the Present Study**

The objective of this study is to present the vowel sound and phonology of Kui language. At the first stage, a descriptive analysis of Kui language spoken by Phulbani (Kondhamal) Kondhs is carried out by analysis of primary data collected from informants and through field trips. Kui belongs to the Central Dravidian language family. It differs from other language in linguistically, socially and culturally.

Kui is the language of the Kond (Khond or Khand) people, who live mainly in the mountainous country that lies between the river Mahanadi in Odisha and the North West corner of the Visakhapatnam district of Andhra Pradesh. It is one of the lesser languages of the greater Dravidian group, displaying a very near kinship to Telugu, and preserving in its grammar an essentially Dravidian formation largely unaffected by Sanskrit or other alien element. Although many of the Kondhs have lost their mother tongue and speak Odia to Telugu instead, members of some other casts and tribes especially those of the ‘Pan caste’, domicile among the Kondhs have adopted Kui as their language.

It should be pointed out here that the Odia language, which is the major language of the state, is surrounding the Kond village on three sides. It is also the main linguistic medium in educational, social, economical and religious spheres. Kui, therefore, is borrowing words and other linguistic features from Odia. In its district a large number of Odia words have intermingled in the ordinary speech of the Kondhs. This fluctuation is due to the amount of contact the hill-man has with the Odia people. But generally speaking Odia influence is more marked in the north and north east of the Kond country than that in the south.

Though a script called ‘Kui Lipi’ has been developed, but there are no available in standard literature. Therefore, it is quite natural that it does not have any written literature. Though certain translations of the Bible as a few school books have been produced in present by missionaries and certain interested bodies, they have written in the Odia script. The Kondhs are scattered in so many different

districts like, Ganjam, Boudh, Phulbani (Kondhamal), Koraput, Rayagada, Kalahandi, Bolangir, Nayagarh, Nabarangpur and Gajapati. A clear difference of vocabulary and pronunciation in various localities can be noticed as one travels through the Kondmal in the south to Ghumusar and Udayagiri Taluka in the east and then westward to the Baliguda Taluka. Though a large number of words are commonly used in all parts among the Kond people, principally there are two dialects, such as (i) the eastern dialect spoken in Ghumusar and the neighbouring areas and (ii) the south dialect spoken in Ganjam, Koraput, Kalahandi, Kandhamal, and Boudh. But according to Grierson northern Kui speakers have come under the influence of neighboring Aryan speakers (that is Odia language).

**Works on Kui language**

Schulze (1911) [22] published two books named Kuvi grammar and vocabulary of the Kuvi-Kond language for establishing the Kui language, both of the books contained data which were a mixture of Kui and the Salur language which was spoken in Koraput.

Some scholars have discussed that there are close affinities between Kui and Telugu. Besides Kuvi Kond and Telugu it has close relationship with the other Central Dravidian languages like Gondi, Kolami, Naiki, Ollari, Gadba, Parji, Pengo and Munda etc.

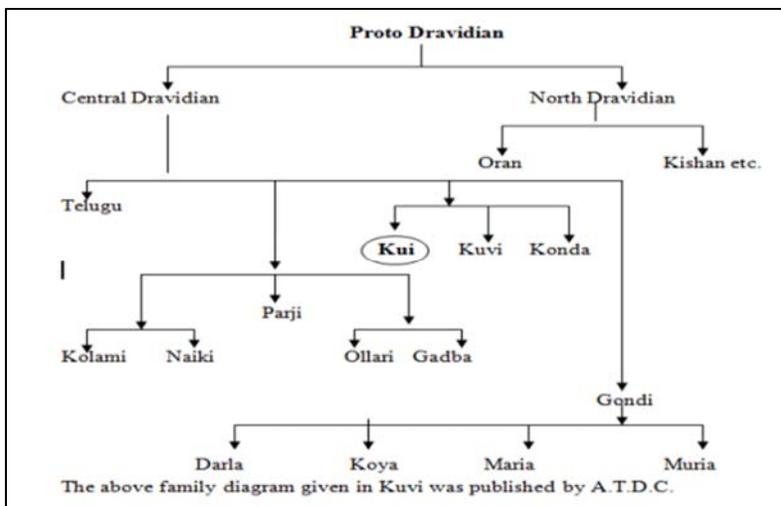
According to the 1891 census, number of the Kui speakers was 627388. In 1928-29 Rev. W.W. Winfield estimated 45000 Kui speaking peoples were leaving at that time. He published it in his books (i) a grammar of the Kui language on 1928 and (ii) A vocabulary of the Kui language on 1929.

Dash (1981) [6] worked on ‘the structure of Kui language’.

Pradhan (1998) [20] worked on Kui grammar for the fulfillment of the need of school children.

Penthoi (2013) [19] Worked on ‘A Contrastive Analysis of Oriya and Kui’

**Language family of Kui**



The above family diagram given in Kuvi was published by A.T.D.C.

**Census data**

According to 2001 census data, the number of Kui speakers was 916222, all of them residing in the state of Odisha. They comprised 2.48% of the total population of the state, numerically occupying the second place among the language of Odisha.

**Table 1: Census table**

Languages speaker	1981	1991	2001
Kui	521585	641662	916222
Decadal percentage increase	48.59%	23.02%	42.79%

**Methodology**

The approach is data oriented and uses in general. The structuralist methodology has been followed for the analysis of the data in the present work. Data was collected from the native speakers through field visit to various Kui speaking areas.

**Kui Vowel Phonology**

Kui has a total number of twenty-six segmental phonemes of which five are vowels and twenty one are consonants. Out of five vowels, two are front, two are back and one is central. In case of vowels there may be short or long and

non-nasalized and nasalized. Therefore, vowel length and nasalization are considered as phonemes in Kui.

**Description of the Phoneme**

As it is necessary for the L2 learners, the articulatory description of each sounds / phonemes are given in this section. The description and distribution of the phonemes in both of these languages have been given below. However the allophonic variation of both of the languages not discussed as the aim of the present work (common) is based on contrastive analysis rather than a descriptive one.

**Table 6: Vowels phonemic table (Kui)**

Height of the Tongue	Advancement Of The Tongue											
	Non-Nasalised						Nasalised					
	Front		Central		Back		Front		Central		Back	
	Short	Long	Short	Long	Short	Long	Short	Long	Short	Long	Short	Long
High	i	i:			U	u:	ĩ	ĩ:			ũ	ũ:
Mid high	e	e:					ẽ	ẽ:				
Mid low					o	o:					õ	õ:
Low			a	a:					ã	ã:		

**Vowel**

In the present study, the vowels are of two types, which are common in both the languages and another in which are uncommon between the both.

/i/ this is a high front unrounded short vowel. It occurs in positions viz. initially, medially and finally positions in Kui.

**Examples**

Initial		Medial		Final	
Kui	Gloss	Kui	Gloss	Kui	Gloss
/ine/	'here'	/aia/	'mother'	/de:ri/	'ragi'
/inba/	'to say'	/bide/	'Useless'	/dili/	'true'
/imba <sup>?</sup> i/	'who'	/diba/	'basket'	/doi/	'a chameleon'

/i:/ this is a high front unrounded long vowel. It occurs in all the three positions in Kui. Its occurrence is less in final Position than that of other position.

**Examples**

Initial		Medial		Final	
Kui	Gloss	Kui	Gloss	Kui	Gloss
/i:kari/	'little girl'	/bi:bu:a;va/	'dust'	/i: /	'this'
/i: ke/	'small'	/bi:bu:giva/	'to make a banging'	/r:i: /	'two'
/i: kɔnaka/	'few people'	/bi:sa/	'poison'	/mi: /	'your (pl.)'

/e/ in the production of this sound the front of the tongue is raised towards the hard palate but not as high as for /i/ described above. The lips are spread. The soft palate is raised at the vocal cords vibrate. This is a higher mid front

unrounded short vowel. It occurs in all the three positions in the languages.

**Examples**

Initial		Medial		Final	
Kui	Gloss	Kui	Gloss	Kui	Gloss
/e:anju/	'that man'	/deri/	'eldest'	/e:anjɛ/	'that man'
/egarɔ/	'eleven'	/detka/	'jump'	/embe: <sup>?</sup> e/	'where'
/eh̄ti/	'such kind'	/eremba/	'there'	/made/	'middle'

/e:/ In the production of this sound the speech organs remain in the same position as in the case of /e/ described above. But they remain for a longer duration as there is

more tension. This is a higher mid front unrounded long vowel. It occurs in all the three positions in Kui.

**Examples**

Initial		Medial		Final	
Kui	Gloss	Kui	Gloss	Kui	Gloss
/e: /	'that'	/be:a/	'back part of the animals'	/bre:bre:/	'cry of a child'
/e:lu/	'wisdom'	/bre:kna/	'chokingly'	/pe:/	'floating'
/e:la/	'companionship'	/de:di/	'sapling'	/uje:/	'real truth'

/a/ in the production of this sound the center of the tongue is at the lowest position. Lips are spread and the vocal cords vibrate. The soft palate is raised. This is a low central

unrounded short vowel and occurs in all the three positions in Kui.

**Examples**

Initial		Medial		Final	
Kui	Gloss	Kui	Gloss	Kui	Gloss
/ada/	‘only’	/a:aru/	‘boys’	/banda/	‘a mortgage’
/adisi/	‘together with’	/badi/	‘the lobe of the ear’	/barša/	‘bravery’
/ahpa/	‘to hold’	/baha/	‘a place’	/ba:rtā/	‘speech’

/a:/ in the production of this sound the speech organs remain in the same position as in the case of /a/ mentioned above. But they remain for a longer period and are tenser. It is a

higher mid back unrounded long vowel. This occurs in all the three positions in Kui.

**Examples**

Initial		Medial		Final	
Kui	Gloss	Kui	Gloss	Kui	Gloss
/a:ngeni/	‘fence’	/ba:dia:va/	‘to grow’	/dinga:/	‘spirit’
/a:ŋja/	‘promise’	/ba:đoba:đosa:va/	‘to context’	/duda:/	‘to tred’
/a:ŋju/	‘that man, he’	/ba:ki a:va/	‘to be in debt’	--	--

/o/ in the production of this sound, the back of the tongue is raised slightly. The degree of rising is lower than the height required for /o/ and higher than that required for /a/. The lips are help rounded. The nasal passage is closed as the vocal

cords are vibrated. This sound is a rounded lower mid back vowel. It occurs in all the positions in Kui.

**Examples**

Initial		Medial		Final	
Kui	Gloss	Kui	Gloss	Kui	Gloss
/okoli/	‘the back of the house’	/kogi/	‘small’	/do:’o/	‘leaf cup’
/oga/	‘to set a trap’	/kogi/	‘green’	/doga/	‘waterfall’
/oda/	‘to swear’	/gogola/	‘necklace’	/donđa/	‘punishment’

/o:/ in the production of this sound the speech organs remain in the same position as in the case of /o/ described above. But they remain for a longer duration at one none tense.

This is called a lower mid back rounded long vowel and is present in Kui at the initial and medial.

**Examples**

Initial		Medial		Final	
Kui	Gloss	Kui	Gloss	Kui	Gloss
/o:/	‘that’	/ko:eri/	‘hornet’	--	--
/o:ga/	‘pride’	/ko:komeđu/	‘a butterfly’	--	--
/o:đa/	‘goat’	/ko:ka/	‘uncle’	--	--

/u/ in the production of this sound the back of the tongue is raised towards the soft palate, but not to the extent of making any content or making a narrow construction. The lips are rounded and the vocal cords vibrate. The soft palate

is raised. This is called the high back rounded short vowel. It occurs in all the three positions in Kui.

**Examples**

Initial		Medial		Final	
Kui	Gloss	Kui	Gloss	Kui	Gloss
/uđa/	‘to accuse, blame’	/dua/	‘tobacco’	/gutu/	‘a species of forest tree’
/uđali/	‘the day light’	/duali/	‘smoke’	/jau/	‘kind of food’
/uje/	‘truth’	/duhpa/	‘may’	/jiu/	‘life, spirit’

/u:/ in the production of this sound the speech organ remain the same position as in the case of /u/ described above. But they remain for a longer duration and are tenser. It is a high back rounded long vowel and it is less frequent in the final

position than that of other positions. It occurs in all the three positions of Kui.

**Examples**

Initial		Medial		Final	
Kui	Gloss	Kui	Gloss	Kui	Gloss
/u:ga/	‘slept off’	/ru:mba/	‘to roar’	/kilu:/	‘clay’
/u:ja/	‘to assemble’	/ru:pa/	‘rubbish’	/julu:/	‘sparking’
/u:ju/	‘flesh’	/ku:sa/	‘edible leaves’	/aku:/	‘sugarcane’

**Nasalized**

All the vowels of Kui which are described above can be nasalized. Nasalization is a co-articulating feature which occurs simultaneously with the oral articulation. In case of nasalization, the velum is lowered so that the nasal passage is open to allow the air to pass through it. The articulatory

movements of the speech organs remain the same in the oral passage for each vowel as described above.

All the vowels of Kui are nasalized.

**Examples**

Nasalized	Kui	Gloss
/ɪ/ → /ĩ/	pĩguri	'A small brass bowl.'
/i:/ → /ĩ:/	pĩ:ga	'stool, a lump, Jung'
/e/ → /ẽ/	tẽgari	'a tier, a high platform'
/e:/ → /ẽ:/	pẽ:	'floating',
/a/ → /ã/	duã	'tobacco'
/a:/ → /ã:/	ã:	'yes'
/ɔ/ → /õ/	põga	'to be sounded abroad'
/ɔ:/ → /õ:/	prõ	'heavy breathing, a sign'
/u/ → /ũ/	mũnja	'buried'
/u:/ → /ũ:/	bũ:	'noise of wind in threes, noise'

**Table 8(a):** Vowel Phonemic table of Kui.

Height of the Tongue	Advancement of Tongue					
	Front		Central		Back	
	Kui		Kui		Kui	
	Short	long	Short	Long	Short	long
High	+	+	-	-	+	+
Nasalized High	+	+	-	-	+	+
Higher Mid	+	+	-	-	-	-
Nasalized Higher Mid	+	+	-	-	-	-
Lower Mid	-	-	-	-	+	+
Nasalized Lower Mid	-	-	-	-	+	+
Low	-	-	+	+	-	-
Nasalized Low	-	-	+	+	-	-

In the tally table of vowel we can get a clear picture live all the five vowels of Kui are available in Odia but one vowels /o/ (mid high back routed vowel) is not present in Kui. But in Kui other five long vowels are available.

1. Kui has segmental and non-segmental phonemes.
2. Nasalization forms out. They cluster with each phonemes, except /ʔ/, /h/, /r/, /r/ phonemes in Kui.
3. Both are spoken in a similar geographical area of the district of Odisha like Phulbani, Koraput, Ganjam, Nayagarh and its adjacent areas.
4. The vowel ending words are seen.

**Contrasts**

Contrasts in both Odia and Kui have been pointed out as follows at phonological level.

1. Kui has five short and five long vowels and twenty one consonants, whereas Odia has only six short vowels and thirty one consonants.
2. Eighteen different consonants are visible in Odia which is not found in the Kui, eight different consonant sounds are present in the Kui which are not present in Odia.
3. Kui does not have the mid-high back rounded vowel i.e., /o/ compared to Odia but the feature of length are present in Kui, which is absent in Odia.

**Conclusion**

The aim of the study is to analysis of vowel phonology of Kui languages. Some important differences of phonology in Kui mentioned below which is not exhaustive rather than sketchy. Such points may be considered as the findings of the present work.

**Phonological findings**

1. There are five vowels, and their corresponding long vowels having phonemic status in Kui. Length however, is considered as vowel sequence as discussed.
2. Mid high back rounded vowel /o/ is not present in Kui. Vowel nasalization is also present in Kui.

**Suggestions**

Findings are not the ultimatum, many more findings may be possible if further research done in such areas of study.

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