

A descriptive account of the Molsom language

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Molsom is a small language belonging to the Sino-Tibetan family spoken in Tripura (India) by about 50000 people approximately. No work of quality has been done on this tiny language so far. In this article an attempt has been made to provide a descriptive profile of this minority language which is virtually on the verge of being declared endangered. In fleshing out the details the areas that will be focused include phonetics, phonology and morphology.

Phonetics: Vowels- Molsom has these monophthongs: in the front flank front high /i/; front high mid /e/; front low mid /ɛ/ and low central /a/. On the back flank back high centralized rounded /u/; back high mid rounded /o/; back low mid rounded /ɔ/. On the back zone it has a high unrounded vowel /ɯ/. As far central vowel, there is the central high unrounded /i/. In respect of diphthongs there are five i-ending /ai ɔi oi ui ui/ and three are u-ending /au əu ou/.

Consonants- Plosives: Molsom has bilabial voiceless plosive /p/, bilabial voiceless aspirated plosive /p^h/, and bilabial voiced plosive /b/. It has only one palatal plosive – a voiceless and unaspirated one namely /c/. In the retroflex zone Molsom has two plosives: voiceless unaspirated /t/ and voiced unaspirated /d/. The language has also dental stops: voiceless unaspirated /t̪/, voiceless aspirated /t̪^h/ and voiced unaspirated /d̪/. There are three velar stops: voiceless unaspirated /k/, voiceless aspirated /k^h/ and voiced unaspirated /g/. Molsom also has voiceless glottal stop /ʔ/. As for fricatives there are three: alveolar fricatives -- voiceless /s/ and voiced /z/; and voiceless glottal /h/. Nasals in Molsom include bilabial /m/, dental /n/ and velar /ŋ/ and all are (by default) voiced. The lone lateral is /l/, and trill /r/.

Phonology: Molsom has mainly words of one-to-three syllables: few are there with four, five and six syllables. The types of syllables include CV, CVC, VC, CVV, VV and V in a decreasing order of preference. There is no long vowel. Diphthongs are interpreted as VV here. Prosodic aspects are under investigation.

Morphology: Molsom has free and bound morphemes. Free ones are independent words. Affixes are of two types: prefixes and suffixes and in consonance with cross-linguistic facts prefixes are less in number.

There are deverbal prefixes ru- and mu- to form nouns. Derivational suffixes include -no, -nim, -mak, -lɔɪziŋ in addition to others. Inflectional suffixes consist of: for verbs - Present Indefinite -t̪^ho/-sin; Past Indefinite: -t̪a/-zouʔa; Future Indefinite: -keʔ, -kaʔ, -kuŋ, -yaʔ, -yuŋ; Progressive (Present and Past): -lɔɪziŋ: hətɔn aneklɔɪziŋ ‘now he (is) eating’; zɔnɪn aneklɔɪziŋ ‘last night he (was) eating’. Future Progressive (same as Future Indefinite): -keʔ, -kaʔ, -kuŋ, -yaʔ, -yuŋ etc.

Nouns get pluralized with the suffixation of -ŋuɪ. Adjective and adverbs undergo degree changes with -uk (for comparative) and -cɛm (for superlative).