

**Consonant Gemination and Compensatory Lengthening in Asamiya  
dialects : Contemporary standard and Central Assam.**

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**1. INTRODUCTION :** This paper attempts to investigate into the process of Gemination as manifested in the Contemporary standard Asamiya dialect (CSD) and examine the intricate process of compensatory lengthening of vowels in the Central Asamiya group of dialects (CAD). These two features demarcate the two types of dialects under study, because gemination of consonants and compensatory lengthening of vowels do not occur in the CAD and the CSD respectively.

The Contemporary standard Asamiya dialect is rooted in the Sibsagar dialect in East Assam, mainly because of the efforts of the American Baptist Missionaries who came and settled there during the beginning of the 19th century<sup>1</sup>,. "The Missionaries made Sibsagar in Eastern Assam the centre of their activities and used the dialect of Sibsagar for their literary purposes" (Kakati 1941 : 15). It was finally made the official language of Assam by the Britishers in 1872, and was accepted as a standard norm by the entire Asamiya linguistic community. Over the years, this Sibsagar dialect has evolved into a distinct form with the continuous influence of the rest of the Asamiya dialects and other indigenous languages of this area<sup>2</sup> and partly because of the shift of activity from Sibsagar to Guwahati (currently the capital of Assam) in western Assam, from the beginning of this century, thereby giving rise to its present form - the CSD.

The group of Asamiya dialects spoken primarily in the

districts of Marigaon and Nagaon and in some parts of Jorhat and Sonitpur districts also of Central Assam share certain distinguishing features which mark it different from the rest of the Asamiya dialects. I have referred to this group as the Central Asamiya dialects.

2. I shall begin with the analysis of consonant gemination in the CSD followed by an analysis of Compensatory lengthening in the CAD.

2.i. For the purpose of negotiating the process of gemination between the consonants in the dialect, various consonant phonemes are shown in the chart below :

	Bilabial	Alveolar	Velar	Glottal
Unaspirated				
stops	p b	t d	k g	
Aspirated stops	ph bh	th dh	kh gh	
Nasals	m	n	N <sup>3</sup>	
Fricatives		s z	x	h
Approximant		r		
Lateral		l		

2.ii. A list of contrastive pairs of words illustrating the phonemes are given below :

CONTRASTS<sup>4</sup> :

(a) /p/r/b/:/ph/:/bh/:/m/

/pur/ 'to fill'

/bur/ 'to drown'

/ph u r/ 'stroll' (2 pa. sg/pl. simp. pres. Hon<sub>3</sub>)

/bh u r/ 'a bamboo raft'

/mur/ 'head'

(b) /t/:/d/:/th/:/dh/:/n/:/s/:/z/:/k/:/g/:/kh/:/gh/

/tam/ 'copper'

/dam/ 'price'

/th a m/ 'to stop'

/dh a m/ 'a holy place'

/nam/ 'name'

/sam/ 'to see' (1 pa. sg/pl. fut)

/zam/ 'to go' (1 pa. sg/pl. fut).

/kam/ 'job'

/gam/ 'sing' (1 pa. sg/pl. fut.)

/kh a m/ 'eat' (1 pa. sg/pl fut).

/gh a m/ 'sweat'

(c) /r/ : /l/

/ruti/ 'bread'

/luti/ 'scammersault'

(d) /k/ : /g/ : /N/

/Sika/ 'rat'

/Siga/ 'broken'

/Si Na/ 'a type of leech'

### 2.iii. DISTRIBUTION :

(a) All the consonant phonemes except /N/, occur at all positions in a word.

(b) /N/ occurs word medially and finally only.

### 2.iv. Gemination of the consonants :

All the consonants except /N z x h r/ and the aspirates can form geminates in the dialect, as in-

/pp/ - /sappOn/ 'fifty six'

/bb/ - /sabbis/ 'twenty six'  
 /tt/ - /uttOr/ 'answer'  
 /dd/ - /adda/ 'gossip'  
 /kk/ - /dh ikkar/ 'disgust'  
 /gg/ - /biggan/ 'science'  
 /mm/ - /zimma/ 'custody'  
 /nn/ - /unnois/ 'nineteen'  
 /ss/ - /assax/ 'assurance'  
 /ll/ - /dilli/ 'place name'

3. Rules governing gemination in CSD are as follows :-

- (i) Geminated consonants of the underlying form<sup>5</sup> are retained in the CSD. It can be shown as underlying VCCV : VCCV (where V is a vowel and C is a consonant).

	<u>Underlying</u>	:	<u>CSD</u>
/pp/	/harappa/		/harappa/ 'name of place'
/tt/	/patta/		/patta/ 'licence for holding land'
/kk/	/mOkka/		/mOkka/ 'place name'
/ll/	/ullasa/		/ullax/ 'happiness'
/mm/	/zimma/		/zimma/ 'custody'
/nn/	/OnnO/		/OnnO/ 'cooked rice'

- (ii) In the underlying form, a consonant occurring as a first member in cluster with the bilabial continuant /w/ in word medial position, changes to geminates in the CSD. It can be shown as underlying VCWV > VCCV, as in

<u>Underlying Form</u>	<u>CSD</u>
/ritwik/	/rittik/ 'noun'
/horidwar/	/horiddar/ 'place name'