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Psycho-Linguistic Approach in Kogi Phonemes

Patricia C. Stendal

Introduction

This study was undertaken to determine which phones would be interpreted as the same and which as different by a non-literate native speaker of the Kogi language. The informant used had some knowledge of letters and printing but was not a reader of either Kogi or Spanish which he speaks as a second language. Scrabble game letters were used, supplemented by some symbols written on bits of cardboard.

First Session

1. The sounds of the vowels A, I and U were reviewed.
2. Two consonant symbols were introduced. K was chosen to represent a backed, aspirated K with a fricative quality to the aspiration [k^x]. [Brackets indicate phonetic writing] G was chosen to represent a slightly voiced velar stop with a nasal onset [$ŋ_g$]. The two sounds were illustrated by two Kogi words in which these sounds are initial. We especially wanted to note which medial velar sounds would be associated with the initial symbols.
3. The informant was asked to spell out the word for mouth, [k^xaxa]. Since this was the word in which I had illustrated the letter K, he chose that for the first letter. I helped him to choose the vowel, A, then with very little hesitation he himself chose the K for the next letter to represent the phone [x]. We then together chose the final A. He made the remark that the two consonants in the word sounded like the same thing.

4. I then gave him the word [sugi] 'pipe'. I placed the S and U for him. I asked him to choose what went next. He picked the I. I asked if he didn't think that something else came first, and he replied that perhaps something did, but it was certainly not the K nor the G which were available to him to choose.
5. Next I tried the word [ak/gau]. The only information I got was that the velar stop was not the same as the K nor G which were available, nor did it seem to him like the missing consonant in [sugi].
6. The next word was [^ŋgauwi] 'he makes' He chose the G for this.
7. Next I tried [axauwi] 'they make' He used AGAUWI for this.
8. Next was [saxa] 'moon' which he spelled SAKA.
9. In the word [axabbɪ] 'I buy from him', he again refused to represent the velar with any of the available symbols.
10. I then gave him the two words [ižgauwa] 'make for me', and [ižgajabbɪ] 'buy for me'. He chose the G for the velar stop in the first word, but again refused to make a choice for the second word.
11. The last word in this session was [naski] 'first person with emphasis'. He again refused to make a choice for the velar stop.

Second Session

1. Two new letters were introduced. N = [n] and D = [d].
2. The first word, [nañi] 'younger brother' was written NANI with my help. In this session I found that while he was reluctant to make choices, he would react decisively to

my suggestions. If he disliked the choice, he told me emphatically that it would not work. If it pleased him he smiled and showed pleasure and relief. In this manner he accepted the writing of NANI.

3. The next word was [naʎa] 'to be'. This word contains a voiced interdental fricative with lateral release. This phone varies morphophonemically with the phone [n]. We were hoping that the informant would want to use the N for the sound. However he rejected both N and D for the fricative lateral, so we left the space blank.

4. We then tried [naʎani] 'younger brother (longer form)'. After placing the NA, the informant seemed very confused. I suggested the possibility of using N with a stressed A eg. NANÁNI. This he accepted very readily and with much pleasure.

5. We then went back to the word [naʎa] 'to be', and he wrote it NANÁ.

6. I then introduced the word [aʎaʎaʎá] 'they are running'. This he confidently spelled out ANANANÁ remarking that all the a's were stressed, but the last one most strongly of all. This triggered a reaction on my part that we seem to have a ballistic quality to certain of our syllables which is evidently causing a reaction in the preceding consonant.

Third Session

1. During the second session I had introduced a word with a [lʎ] supposing that he would choose either N or D for the symbol, but he felt that it was different from either one, so we chose the letter L for that sound.

2. In this third session we wrote the word for tree [k^xalʎi]

KALI. He seemed very pleased with the word.

3. I tried [makual^yi] 'you will do', and he chose the L again, but rejected any of the previous letters for the velar.
4. For [nigukú] '1st person past' he chose NIXUXÚ. I had offered him an X to use for velars that were not K or G.
5. For [nigakú] '1st person plural past' he chose NIGAXÚ.
6. For [nigú] '3rd person singular' NIXÚ.
7. He would not select or accept symbols for the velar stops in [ižgajabb̃i] or [nugi].
8. For [ná guá] he wrote NÁGUAN. The final N was his own idea.
9. For [juľúngua] JÚNÚGUÁ 'enter' He likes the three stresses, but no final N. He identified the gua as more strongly stressed than the others.

Fourth Session

1. [k^xál^yi] 'tree or pole' First chose K, then chose I, but put it towards the end saying "falta poquito" (It lacks a little). Then he chose A and put it between. I gave him the L as he didn't remember the sound from yesterday. He placed it and added the stress on the A. KÁLI
2. [najúl^yi] 'my home' Chose N and A, and I gave him J. He then placed the final I, then the U, and pushed the I close to the U. I suggested that he was missing one letter. By comparing with KÁLI he chose L and placed it. He placed the stress on the U.
3. [nigú] '3rd person immediate past' He chose N, then the final U. With help he chose the I. He rejected both the K and the G for the stop so I gave him the X to represent that sound. He placed the stress on the U. NIXÚ

4. [ná guá] 'Come' He placed the N, then L He rejected the L and placed an A, then placed a K and rejected it. Finally he chose the G, then a U and an A with stress. He did not place a final N and when I suggested it he refused it. NAGUÁ

5. [nigúngukú] '1st person recent past' He chose N, then final U, then I. He was very confused with the three stops so I placed the vowels leaving holes for the stops, NI U U U. He chose X for the middle stop as being the same as in NIXU [nigú] '3rd person immed. past. Then he placed the last stop as X, but with reservations. When I suggested the stress mark on the last syllable it seemed to relieve his mind. He was very confused on the first stop. He rejected X for it from the start. Finally he placed G. He says it goes well with a G when he says it slowly, but he is not so satisfied in fast speech. He wanted another stress and said the final one was the strongest so we introduced ˆ NIGÚXUXÚ.

Fifth Session

At this session he had available cards including both a vowel and stress Á, and also syllable cards, GA, GU, GI etc.

1. [gamá] 'carrying bag' The informant chose G and then A. I gave him M as he had not been taught that sound. He had trouble with the final vowel, first choosing U, then rejecting it and replacing it with A. He did not wish to place stress on any part of the word, in spite of the fact that to our ear the final syllable is stressed.

2. [ni guamá] 'lukewarm water' He selected NI, then A. After much deliberation he placed the G. He knew that something was missing, but could not say what. I suggested U and he accepted it. He then had NIGUA. I placed the MA and he placed stress on the final syllable. NIGUAMÁ
3. [gáji] 'to eat' He chose G, then I. I told him that something was missing and placed J (a new letter to him) leaving a blank. He placed A in the correct place and put stress on the I. GAJÍ
4. [nakági] 'my mother-in-law' I placed the NA as he didn't seem to know how to get started. He then selected K and I. He was very discouraged over the remaining letters so I suggested A. He took that and then tried a stressed í. (This was the only time he chose a stressed vowel.) He rejected that and finally selected G, but he did not seem very pleased with it. He wanted two stresses. NAKÁGÍ
5. [gába] 'don't' and [gába] 'much' I explained the meanings of these two words and asked him to select the first letter for each one. In both cases he chose a G.
6. [guksái] 'fire' He chose U first, then A. He could not think of any more letters to use for this word, so I moved the A over and added S and I making U SAI. He would not choose G, K or X for either of the stops.
7. [nak] 'come' He placed NA with no trouble. I suggested final K, and he accepted it. NAK
8. [k^xaí] 'grass' He placed KA. He accepted the NÁ as being the same as the last syllable of NANÁ [naí] 'to be'

which we had spelled previously. KANÁ

9. [k^xáʎa] 'leg' He accepted KÁNA but was able to choose only the KA and the stress on the first syllable.

10. [k^xaʎáxaʎa] 'pasture' I suggested that we might spell this word KANAKANÁ and he seemed satisfied.

11. [nagakúkaʎ] 'bring me' He placed NA, then KU, then G. He tried and rejected U after G. He accepted A after G when I suggested it but could not spell the last syllable. NAGAKU

12. He did not choose any of the syllable cards, and only once used a stressed vowel when he was seeking a new symbol.

Sixth Session

I introduced him to the sounds of S and Z at the start of this session.

1. [súgi] He chose S and then I. I asked if he wanted it close to the S or farther away, and he remarked that it was the last sound in the word. Finally he placed U. He was stuck again for the stop. I suggested GG, but he didn't like that. I suggested KG and to my surprise he accepted it with much pleasure. SUKGI I was so excited about the cluster that I forgot to ask him to place stress.

2. [ásigí] 'man' He chose A for the first letter, then I for the last, then S. I suggested the KG again, and he accepted it. He was very puzzled about the vowel following S. I suggested I and he accepted it. He placed stress on the I. ASIKGÍ

3. [sɨgi] 'deer' For this word I gave him SUKGI first

and asked him to show me how the word for deer was different. I suggested a TS, TSUKGI, but he didn't like this. He identified the difference as being in the first vowel and then tried all the vowels. After trying U, A, and I, he chose I and placed stress on the last vowel. SIKGÍ

4. [za] 'eat' He chose S and A and says no stress. SA

Seventh Session

1. [zúnguá] 'throw out' I repeated the sounds of S and Z. He chose S, then A at the end. He chose I next to S. I suggested U instead, and he accepted it with reservations. He wouldn't place any more letters so I suggested SÚGUA, and he accepted it.

2. [zúguá] 'cook' I suggested SÚKGUA and he accepted it.

3. [jusú] 'crab' I placed JU. He chose S. He placed stress. JUSÚ

4. [k^xása] 'foot' He chose KASÁ.

Conclusions

From this study we were able to determine:

1. That S and Z sound very similar to the informant.
2. That we have a secondary stress or ballistic syllable quality to which the informant reacts more strongly than to phonemic stress.
3. That we have a word medial velar fricative which combines with initial k^x and final k^l.
4. That we have another word medial velar fricative which combines with initial ŋg.
5. That one of our medial velar stops may be a cluster of KG. At least this transcription would be acceptable

to the informant.

6. That we have other medial velar stops which require more study as they are confusing to the informant. It may be that he is reacting to the following vowel, i.e. interpreting the G in GA as different from the G in GU.

7. The fact was also revealed that this informant does not follow a left to right progression, but consistently picked the first letter, then the last letter of the word, then filled in the other letters. This may explain his trouble with learning to read, especially when a syllable approach was used.