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SYLLABLE STRUCTURE IN LANGUAGE GAMES IN PNAR

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ABSTRACT

Language games have been referred to with different names such as *ludling, secret languages, disguised speech, play-language, argot,* etc. in the literature published so far. By and large the same idea has been referred to by different names. At times, secret language is a cover term for some of these terms. Some writings specifically differentiate one term from the other. This paper argues that the concepts of *language games* and *secret language* are pragmatically different. The difference is in the function rather than the form: it is a language game when two competent speakers engage in conversation using different (twisting) codes, and it is a *secret language* when it is used to conceal the speech form from children or outsiders or for that matter from any of the in-groups who do not share the code system. So in this regard, the correctness of the term (*language game* or *secret language*) does not lie in the text that is spoken but in the contexts of the speech. This paper, drawing data from the language Pnar, also attempts to discuss how syllabic constructions are manipulated to disguise the normal speech.

Keywords: Pnar, language game, secret language, syllable structure, form/function

1. Language game: An introduction

One of the characteristics of spoken language is that the sound structure of words bears an essentially *arbitrary* relationship to meaning and thus arbitrariness ultimately becomes one trademark of spoken language that has been discussed by many linguists (Saussure, 1959; Hockett, 1977). It is this very nature of arbitrariness that distinguishes spoken language from other types of communication systems. In the play of language or language-games the same arbitrariness shows up, however the language-games too are rule-governed and exhibit exceptions too.

The concept of language games is marginally different from the concept of *secret language* in Pnar. The difference lies in terms of function rather than the usage; it is a language game when two competent speakers engage in conversation using the different codes, and it is a *secret language* when it is used to conceal the speech form or its semantic from the children or outsiders or for that matter to any of the in-groups who do not share the code system. So in this regard, the correct term of the usage derived only from the contexts and not of the texts. This paper attempts to explain how syllables in Pnar are switched (swapped, interchanged, exchanged, mutually replaced) to encode the speech in such a way that only those who know the code could follow it. Just like any natural language or any other games, language game is also no exception to the rule; it is rule-governed and should be observed in every respect with regular rules. Manipulation of words, phrase or sentences always needs to be done in systematic phonological, morphological and syntactic rules.

1.1 Towards a definition of the terms

While language-games are different from the secret languages, the two have often been compared. In the literature hitherto available the term *language games* have been referred to by different names; such as *ludling, secret languages, disguised speech, play-language, language-play,*

achterooetkalle, *argot* etc (Gussenhoven, 2014; Davis, 1993; Imai et al. 2008; Laycock, 1972, Crystal, 1998; Botne & David, 2000; Blake, 2010 and others). It has also been observed that the term, 'secret language', has been used as a cover-term. In other works, an attempt had been made to specifically differentiate one term from the other. For the sake of our understanding, I have reviewed the notion rather summarily in the following paragraphs.

Language games

In its simple sense, the term *language games* means 'to play with language (with words)'. Davis (1993) maintains that language game refers to a fairly widespread language play phenomenon in which phonological forms of words are systematically altered so as to disguise what they are meant. Why are we playing with language? Language is both cognitive and social, a system as well a process. It has been popularly and commonly defined as an act of communication, to convey our feelings, to share our idea, knowledge etc. to other as well as trying to comprehend theirs. But we are not using language for most of the time just to convey our idea, to share our feeling and so on and so forth. There are times when we use language to fill the social void gap, to maintain our social relationship etc. as par with these, we also play with language. Crystal (1999) in his paper '*Loving linguistic lucidity*' replies to the above question 'just for fun'. He (1998) further clarifies "we play with language when we manipulate it as a source of enjoyment, either for ourselves or for the benefit of others. A rather more inclusive definition of language game given by Botne and David (2000) states that:

> *Language games in which the phonological forms of words are systematically altered have been well-studied from a typological perspective. The two most common types of language games entail the transposition of phonological constituents (usually syllables) and the addition of phonemes at one or more locations within the word.*
>
> [Botne & Davis, 2000, p. 319]

Secret language

Blake (2010) states language is a means of communication, but a good deal of language use is deliberately obscure if not actually encrypted in some form of cipher or code. The code comes in different form to confuse or conceal the listener. Apart from the regular language that any community uses, any new or existing different codes developed by any section of the community or group(s) that ranged from two to many persons, for the purpose of conversation to ensure secrecy may be considered as secret language. The definition of *secret language* ranges from a very general to more specific as has been given by different scholars.

Ludling

Another term has been widely used have concept similar to language game or secret language is "*ludling*". The term ludling was coined by Laycock (1972) which is a combination of the Latin words *ludus* "game" and *lingua* "language" to mean 'language games'. According to him;

> *"A ludling is [...] the result of a transformation or series of transformations acting regularly on an ordinary language text, with the intent of altering the form but not the content of the original message, for purposes of concealment or comic effect."*
>
> (Laycock, 1972, p. 61)

Davis (1993, 1980) agrees with Laycock on the form and purpose of ludling but mentions the alteration of the phonological forms of words. He states that *ludling* refers to a "widespread language play phenomenon in which phonological forms of words are systematically altered so as to disguise what they are." Bagemihl (1995) divides ludlings into three types: (i) Affixing or infixing ludlings (ii) Templaticludlings, in which the melodic portion of a standard language word is mapped onto a specified word-sized ludling template. (iii) Reversal ludlings

2. Pnar: An Introduction

The Pnars belongs to *Khasian* group of languages of the Austro-Asiatic language family. It is spoken mainly in the two districts of Meghalaya: West Jaintia Hills and East Jaintia Hills. There are also numbers of speakers in some places of the neighbouring states like Assam (Cachar Hills and North Cachar Hills districts of Assam) and Mizoram (Vairengte, Kolasib district). Not to forget that the speaking community spread even across the border (Bangladesh) and of course this concept of border is only triggered after the independence. It is also known as Jaintia (Spencer, 1967) or earlier as Synteng (Grierson, 1928). The Census of India (2001) puts the number of Pnar speakers in India at around 243,441 and the total number of Pnar speakers around the world at 247,000 (Ethnologue, languages of the world). But according to the latest census by People's Linguistic Survey of India (2014), the population of Pnars has risen to 3,92,853.[1]

The term *Khasian* was used by Diffloth (2005) to specify its position under the Khasi Khmuic branch of the Austro-Asiatic language family. According to him, there are four languages under this term *Khasian*. In the earlier classification he (Diffloth, 1974) groups the Khasi language and its dialects directly under Mon-Khmer along with Palaungic, Monic, Khmuic, Vietmuong, Katuic, Bahnaric, Pearic, Khmer, Semang, Sakai and Semelaic. And in the latter edition (1982) (as cited in Ruhlen 1991), he regroups Khasi language along with Palaungic-Khmuic and Vietmuong under the North branch of the Mon-Khmer.

2.1 Sound pattern of Pnar

Table 1: Consonant Chart of Pnar (Bareh, 2016)

Stops	p	b	t	d	c	ɟ	k		ʔ	
Aspirated Stops	p^h		t^h				k^h			
Nasals	m		n		ɲ		ŋ			
Fricatives			s						h	
Trill			r							
Lateral			l							
Semivowels	w					j				

Pnar has twenty one consonants of which eleven are *stops*, four are *nasals*, two are *fricatives*, two of them are *semi vowels,* and *trill* & *lateral* one each. The earlier analyses, Bareh (2007, 2014), mention that there are twenty four consonants in Pnar, which included the voiced aspirated stops. However, these sounds are omitted from the list of consonants as they occur only in borrowed words with the exception of voiced aspirated palatal stop /ɟ^h/, where this sounds occurs in few native words of Pnar like like /ɟhan/ 'hurry', /ɟheʔ/ 'wet'. Another opinion regarding these *voiced aspirated stops* by Khyriem (2013), in her analysis, she treats these sounds as a cluster of the voiced plosive and the glottal fricative /h/. Another work on the sound pattern especially on these *voiced aspirated stops* of Pnar by Hiram Ring; in two of work (2012, 2015) are seen contradicted with each other especially the treatment of the voice aspirated palatal stop. Ring

(2012) does not consider the palatal aspirate /ɟh/ as phonemic but acknowledges the existence of the two palatal stops /c/ and /ɟ/ that are realised as affricates [ʧ] and [ʤ] respectively when they occur in the onset of a syllable. In his unpublished thesis (2015) he treats /ʧ/ and /ʤ/ as two different phonemes that are realised as [c] and [ɟ] respectively in the syllable coda. However, in all these works agree to some extent with the rest of the consonantal phonemes of Pnar.

In the analysis of the vowel phonemes, Pnar has seven monopthongs and one diphthong /ia/. Though [ɨ] occurs frequently in many native words of Pnar, yet it is not treated as phoneme as its occurrence is predictable. It always occurs in the minor syllable that precedes the nasals and the liquids. The vowels[2] comprise of two high vowels, two mid-highs, two mid-lows and one low vowel. The followings are the vowel phonemes of Pnar.

Table 2: Vowel phonemes of Pnar

i		u
e		o
ɛ		ɔ
aia		

2.2 Syllabic pattern of Pnar

Syllable structure plays an important role in the organization of phonological processes of a language. Pnar is basically a monosyllabic language. There are few disyllabic words, otherwise disyllabic and trisyllabic words are mostly compound words. In Pnar, the syllable pattern constitutes in an onset, a peak and a coda. The nucleus of the syllable is the peak which consists of a vowel; unlike the peak and the coda, the nucleus is an obligatory one. Pnar has only two syllables in basic words. Polysyllabic words seem to be compound words, (even though they do not carry meaning in it). It is to be noted that Pnar also has number of sesquisyllabic words; the minor syllable seems to lose its meaning overs the period of time. Pnar has the following syllable types for monosyllabic words: V, VC, CV, CVC, CCV, and CCVC. Thus its maximal syllable template is CCVC; there is no obligatory onset. All syllable types can occur word-initially and word-finally.

There are five types of permitted syllable in Pnar, in the initial position of the words. Out of five, two are open syllables and three are closed syllables. They are: CV-, CCV-, VC-, CVC-, and CCVC-. Medial syllables are of two types; one is open syllable (-CV-) and the other is close syllable (-CVC-)[3]. The syllables that can be found in the final position of words are; -CV, -CVC and -CCVC. Of these, two are open and two are closed syllables.

a. Here are some examples with the V pattern, word-initially and word-finally, respectively:
   1. [i:] 'we'
   2. [u:] 'he'

b. Here are some examples with VC, word-initially and word-finally, respectively:
   3. [ac] 'to pass motion'
   4. [aŋ.no:t] 'longing, desire'
   5. [ar] 'two'

c. Here are some examples with CV, word-initially, word-medially and word-finally, respectively:

6. [c^{h}a] 'to (preposition)'
7. [k^{h}ia] 'heavy'
8. [pa.k^{h}ɔt] 'to throw'
9. [c^{h}a.ra.tɔʔ] 'praying mantis'
10. [ra.pa.ti] 'dove'
11. [k^{h}a.na] 'to tell'

d. Here are some examples with CVC, word-initially and word-finally, respectively:

12. [sɔʔ] 'fruit'
13. [tuŋ.tɔʔ] 'fermented soya'
14. [tɨrnɛm] 'hammer'
15. [t^{h}a.nɛr] 'wings'

e. Here are some examples with CCV, in monosyllabic words and word-initially:

16. [c^{h}na] 'to build'
17. [c^{h}la.ni] 'winnowing basket'
18. [c^{h}wa.wiaŋ] 'flute'

f. Here are some examples with CCVC, word-initially and word-finally, respectively.

19. [klɔŋ] 'bottle'
20. [slɔŋ.saɲ] 'a kind of sour fruit'
21. [la.tʔap] 'crow'
22. [sa.trun] 'pineapple'

It is to be noted that like the other Mon-Khmer group, Pnar also has a lot of sesquisyllabic[4] words. The term 'sesquisyllabic word structure' has been discussed by many scholars (Diffloth & Zide, 1992; Khyriem, 2013) in the field of phonological features of Monkhmer languages. In Pnar, words like [t^{h}ɨmme], [tɨrc^{h}ut], are, by nature sesquisyllabic because they are in between mono and disyllabic words. It is certainly more than one syllable but not enough to be considered as two syllables because this is one of the weakest forms of syllabication/syllable structure and the phonetic presyllable is in a predictable open transition of the liquids and nasals (phonetically, the construction of these syllables, in most cases, the half part of the syllable comprises of the high central vowel [ɨ] precedes the liquids and nasals). In terms of sonority scale, nasals and liquids are having sonority values of 5 to 7, which is more than enough for these sounds to function as a peak of the syllable, as in these examples /t^{h}m̩me/ 'new' and /tr̩c^{h}ut/ 'to scrub'.

It is also to be noted that a minor syllable (which phonetically comprises the high central vowel [ɨ]) is reduced and phonemically appear in this way /t^{h}m̩me/ and /tr̩c^{h}ut/. Comparatively, the following syllable is heavier than the presyllable in these examples above. In this type of syllable structure, the C_iC- = CC-, unlike the final syllables where it is permitted a structure CCVC. Rabel (1961) also uses these terms, 'major' and 'minor' syllables in her analysis of Khasi language, where she states that a minor syllable always followed by a major syllable. Another reason to have this kind of comparison is that, it is to be noted that in Pnar, the stress always falls on the final syllable. It is to be noted that the whole idea of bringing the 'sesquisyllabic word structure' in this discussion is to check that how the exchange of syllables in language game of

Pnar is possible (which will be discussed in section 3 of this paper), where there is a disparity among the syllables. As we have seen in these examples, phonetically, the high central vowel [i] always precedes the liquids and nasals in a minor syllable.

3. Language games in Pnar

As mentioned earlier, the title of this paper is entitled as *language games* or *secret language*, the fact is that, it very difficult to decide whether the concepts of *language games* or *secret language* is more appropriate in this case. *Language games* is more appropriate when competent speakers engage in conversation using this different codes of the language and *secrete language* when one chooses to conceal the speech form from the children or outsiders or for that matter to any of the in-groups who not shared/ learned the code system. So in this regard, the correct term of the usage derived only from the contexts and not of the texts. Hence, it is given language games/secret language in Pnar and languages or secret language will be used interchangeably throughout this paper.

There are two practices among portion of Pnar speakers in connection to the language games; *reversing game* and *Tyrwiawliwaiñ [tirwiawliwaɲ]*.

3.1 Reversing game

Several scholars have produced scholarly works on language-games (Borowsky & Avery 2009; Alidou, 1997; Crystal, 1996; Bagemihl, 1989) of different languages. Begamihl (1989) classifies taxonomy of reversing games into four primary categories; viz, *(i) transposing games, (ii) interchange games, (iii) exchange games, and (iv) total reversing games*. According to him;

(a) *Transposing Games* are those games that move a syllable from one end of the word to the opposite end

(b) *Interchange Games* are those games which exchange the position of two adjacent syllables on one edge or the other.

(c) *Exchange Games* are those games that exchange constituents on both ends of the form or sometimes in a phrase.

(d) *Total reversing Games* are those games where all of the segments in the word can be reversed.

These are the possible positions where syllables could alter as presented by Bagemihl (op cit.); however, the alteration of syllables in Pnar does not fit in any of categories. The process of the entire game in Pnar is to rearrange the parts of syllables of words or sentences. Bagemihl's *Transposing Games* is closely similar to Pnar language game in terms of moving a syllable from one end of the word to the opposite end. However, in Pnar the process is restricted only to the rhymes and not to the entire syllables. Since the process is dealing with moving or switching rhymes from σ_1 to σ_2, apparently requires at least two syllables and the process would not work with monosyllabic words. However, it perfectly works for the disyllabic words or words having more than two syllables. It also requires different rules for different syllabications.

In the frame of the syllable structure, a syllable is usually made up of an onset and a rhyme, and a rhyme which is further divided into to a nucleus and a coda. The process can be illustrated with the following diagrams below:

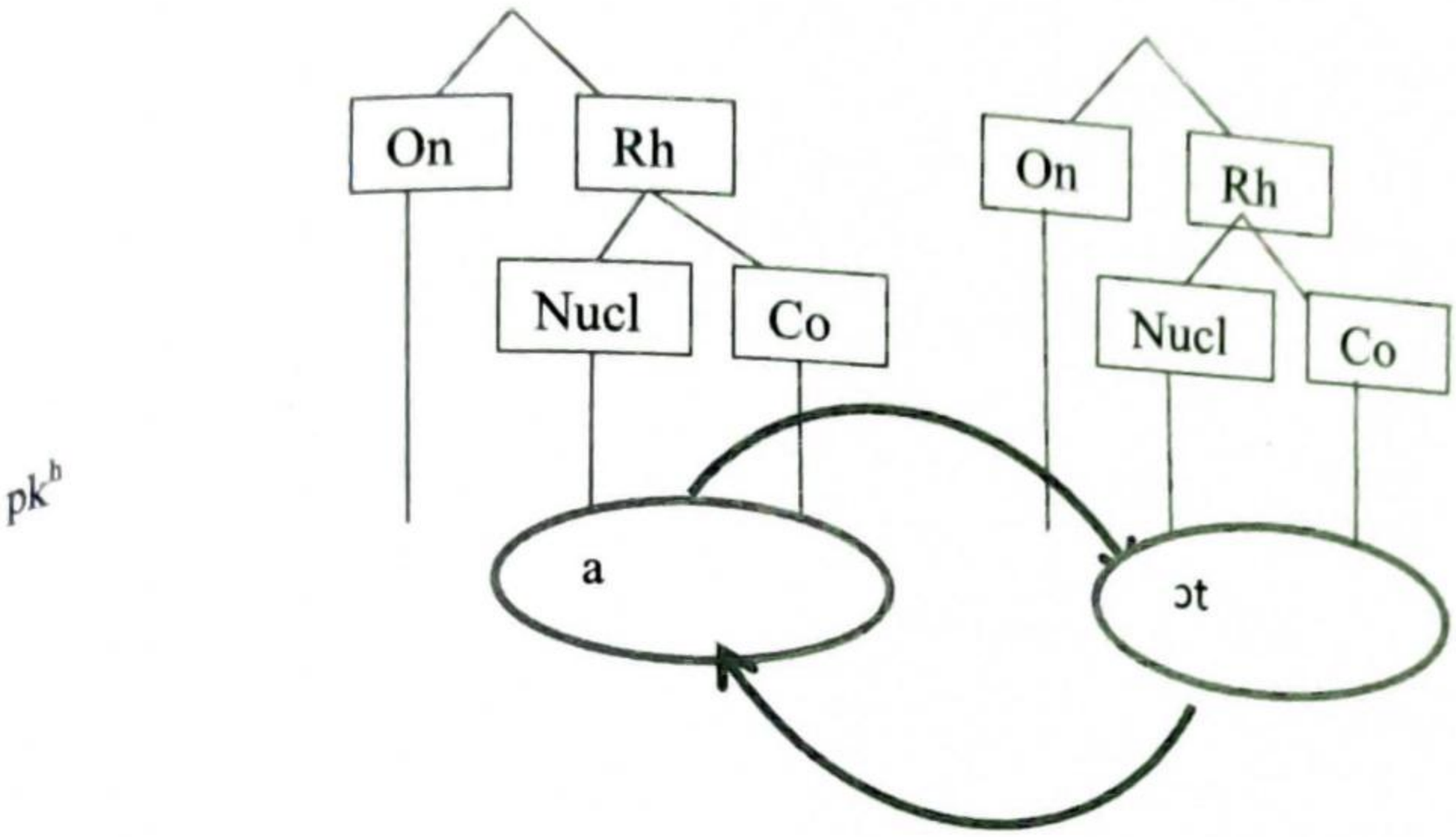

Figure 1: Syllable switched in language game

(i) Disyllabic words

As mentioned earlier, since the game involves moving the (parts of) syllable from one position to another, this scheme is not possible for the monosyllabic word. But it is a perfect fit for disyllabic words provided the syllables do not share the same rhyme. Take, for example, the word [k^{h}a.te] 'to deduct'; it becomes [k^{h}e.ta] and the word [pa.k^{h}ɔt] 'to throw' becomes [pɔt.k^{h}a]. The processes to distort the syllables here are;

(a) The onsets of both the syllables are not affected. Both [k^h] and [t] are firmly intact in the same position they were in.
(b) However, the rhymes of both the syllables in this example are completely distorted. Both the nucleus and the coda are got switched in order to manipulate the sound pattern.

If we observe here closely, the nucleus of the first syllable moves to the nucleus position of the second syllable and the second's to the first. Hence, [k^{h}a.te] changes to[k^{h}e.ta].This can be illustrated in this way for clarity:

23. [k^{h}a.te] 'to deduct' → [k^{h}e.ta]
    $\sigma_1 C_1V_1\ \sigma_2 C_2V_2$ → $\sigma_1 C_1V_2\ \sigma_2 C_2V_1$
24. [pa.lɔŋ] 'bed' → [pɔŋ.la]
    $\sigma_1 C_1V_1\ \sigma_2 C_2V_2\ C_3$ → $\sigma_1 C_1V_2C_3\ \sigma_2C_2V_1$

This process can be experimented with other languages. Take, for instance, the English word [kəm.plein] 'complain' → [kein.pləm]

(ii)Trisyllabic words

In compounds or phrases or sentences which contain three syllables there are four possibilities of combination we can have;

- It is either a trisyllabic word
- a combination of monosyllabic with a disyllabic (monosyllabic + disyllabic)
- a combination of disyllabic with a monosyllabic (disyllabic + monosyllabic)
- or a combination of three monosyllabic words (monosyllabic + monosyllabic + monosyllabic)

There are very few trisyllabic words in Pnar, but trisyllabic construction can be easily found in the compound words, phrases and sentences. The process of twisting these trisyllabic words is different from what we have seen with the disyllabic words. For example,

25. [cʰa.ra.tɔʔ] 'praying mantis' → [cʰɔʔ.ra.ta]
26. [cʰeʔ.rɨŋ.ku] 'lizard' → [cʰu.rɨŋ.keʔ]

What Bagemihl (1995) terms as *interchange games* is applicable to the entire syllable; a syllable interchanges its place with the adjacent syllable. But what is prevalent in Pnar is restricted only to rhymes of syllable without the onset. However, in both of these cases, the shifting is from one syllable to the other either part or whole. Bagemihl's model of *interchange games* is fairly similar to language game of Pnar with disyllabic words.

However, these are the possible processes for trisyllabic constructions.

a. In a trisyllabic word, as illustrated in the examples above, the rhyme of the first syllable interchanges with the third syllable, but the second syllable is left untouched and so remains as it is.

b. In a trisyllabic compound word or phrase or sentence where we have a combination of a monosyllabic word and the other being a disyllabic word again the process of interchange is between the rhyme of the first syllable and the rhyme of the third syllable and the rhyme of second syllable is left untouched. This can be illustrated by the following examples;

c.

27. [mratdu.riaw] 'sea animal' → [mriawdu.rat]
28. [kʰlapir.tʰɔʔ] 'striping tiger' →[kʰlɔʔpir.tʰa]

d. In a trisyllabic compound word or phrase or sentence where we have a combination of a disyllabic word first and the other is a monosyllabic word then the process of interchange here is between the rhymes of the second syllable and the third syllable while the first syllable is left untouched as in the following examples:

29. [mu.ɟakɟat] 'sock' → [mu.ɟatkɟa]
30. [ka.likʰwe] 'recovery van' → [ka.lekhwi]

e. And finally, if all the words in a compound/phrase/sentence are monosyllabic words then the process again would be the same like the previous two combinations above; the process of interchange is between the rhyme of the first syllable and the rhyme of the third syllable and the rhyme of second syllable is left undisturbed. This can be illustrated by the following examples;

31. kʰniaŋ bam kba: → kʰna: bam kbiaŋ
insect eat rice
'pest'

32. lrdize^ha → ln dize^hr
come drink tea
'Come have tea'

(iii) Polysyllabic words

Just like the kind of construction we have seen in a trisyllabic word, words with larger syllables have different processes for switching the rhymes of the syllables There is no polysyllabic word in Pnar, but just like trisyllabic, polysyllabic construction can be easily found in compound words, phrases and sentences. For the purpose of our illustration here, I choose a compound or a phrase or a sentence containing four syllables. Again in any compounds or phrases or sentences which contain four syllables, we could be possibly arriving at these three kinds of possibilities of combination:

- a combination of monosyllabic with a trisyllabic (monosyllabic + trisyllabic)
- a combination of disyllabic word with a disyllabic word (disyllabic + disyllabic)
- or a combination of trisyllabic word with a monosyllabic word (trisyllabic + monosyllabic word).

The possible processes for tetra syllabic construction:

a. In a tetrasyllabic compound or phrase or sentence where the combination is a monosyllabic word first then a trisyllabic word, the rhymes of the second and the fourth syllables switch but the first and the third remain untouched.

33. [uc^{h}a.ra.tɔʔ] 'praying mantis (masculine)' → [u c^{h}ɔʔ.ra.ta]
34. [kac^{h}eʔ.rɨŋ.ku] 'lizard (feminine)' → [kac^{h}u.rɨŋ.keʔ]

b. Also when we have a combination of a disyllabic word and a disyllabic word again the process of interchange is like the above, between the rhyme of the second syllable and the rhymes of the fourth syllable, where the rhyme of the first and the third syllables remain untouched.

35. [tɨn.jaw k^{h}ad.doʔ] 'last week' → [tɨnjoʔk^{h}addaw]
week last
36. [ɟu.tik^{h}ɨn.dɔŋ] 'high heel shoe' → [ɟutɔŋk^{h}indi]
shoe heel

c. In a tetrasyllabic compound word or phrase or sentence where we have a combination of a trisyllabic word and the other being a monosyllabic word then the process of interchange becomes very complex; the rhyme of the last syllable is switched to first syllable, the rhyme of the first syllable is switched to the third syllable and the rhyme of the third syllable is switched to the fourth syllable and the rhyme of the second syllable is left untouched as in the example below;

37. [c^{h}eʔ.rɨŋ.kustɛm] 'lizard' → [c^{h}ɛm.rɨŋ.keʔstu:]

Probably one would ask the possibility of a combination of four monosyllabic words (monosyllabic + monosyllabic + monosyllabic + monosyllabic) within a phrase/ compound/ sentence, as we have seen with the other syllabic patterns. It is possible to have a phrase/ compound/ sentence with four monosyllabic words but the question is that, once we have a phrase/ compound/ sentence with more than three syllables, then twisting of the rhymes of syllables is among the adjacent by grouping them as a pair.

3.2 Tyrwiawliwaiñ [tirwiawliwaɲ]

Tyrwiaw liwaiñ is another language game practised by some sections of Pnar speakers. This is another level of difficulty for some as compared to the earlier one (reversing game) we discussed in section 3.1. Anyone who knows the rules of this game implies that he is at ease with the reverse game but knowing the rules of reverse game does not guarantee that one knows the rules of *tyrwiawliwaiñ*. Most of the participants of this game are from Rymbai village and the small nearby villages (apparently I have not come across anyone from other part of Pnar speaking areas who understand this game). This game derives its name from the sounds of the rhymes when twisted. *Tyrwiawliwaiñ* is a nonsensical word and as such, has no meaning. *liwaɲ* is added to the lexical words or phrases or sentences and the rhymes of the syllables are switched accordingly in order to make the words or phrases or sentences disguised in such a way. For example, the lexical $k^hɔn$ 'child' becomes $k^haɲliwɔn$. The process to arrive at such confusing words is of two steps:

Step 1: combine the lexical [$k^hɔn$] 'child' with the nonsensical element [*liwaɲ*] to get the combined word [$k^hɔnliwaɲ$].
Step 2: Switch the rhymes of the first and last syllables and it changes to [$k^haɲliwɔn$].

The same process as in the reverse game is followed depending on the number of syllables. Just like what we have noticed in the reverse game, the selection of syllables becomes complicated here. It is not only on the number of syllable but also the types of syllables attached to *liwaɲ*. The selection of syllables for switching varies according to the number of syllables in a word. If it is a trisyllabic (after the combination with *liwaɲ*, assuming the only the monosyllabic word as in the example above and *liwaɲ* ($k^hɔn$ 'child' + *liwaɲ*), the rhymes of the first syllable and the rhyme of the last or third syllable are switched over. If the outcome is four syllables, (after the combination of disyllabic word with *liwaɲ*), the affected syllable rhymes are of the second and fourth syllable. But if it is a combination of monosyllabic word + monosyllabic word + *liwaɲ*, then the switching becomes even more complicated. The choice of selecting the lexical words to be combined with the *liwaɲ* is critical. In a sentence, one should know which are words (lexical or function words) to be selected and combine with *liwaɲ*, or else one would end up in suffixing all the elements in a sentence. Once the selection is done, switching becomes easier. Take for example, a simple interrogative sentence:

38.	*u*	*jɔŋ*	*$k^hɔn$*	*u-ni*	*ne*
	3SG=M	POSS	child	3SG=M DEM	Q

'Whose child (male) is this?'

Becomes; *u jaɲliwɔŋ u $k^haɲliwɔnuni$ ne*

Process:

Step 1: Add *liwaɲ* to lexical words as suffix (Though I mention lexical words, yet occasionally some lexical words are not suffixed to this nonsensical word *liwaɲ* and certainly in most cases, it is not possible to attach it to all of the function words.
u {jɔŋ[liwaɲ]} {k^hɔn[liwaɲ]} uni ne

Step 2: switch the rhyme of these combine words
{jɔŋ[liwaɲ]} > {jaɲliwɔŋ}
{k^hɔn[liwaɲ]} > {k^haɲliwɔn}

In step 2 the same process is followed. As we have seen earlier, the medial syllable is unaffected by this process. Hence, the sentence;

39. *ujɔŋkʰɔmuni ne* is combined with *liwaŋ* as in this way:
40. *ujɔŋ[liwaŋ] kʰɔn[liwaŋ] uni ne* then it changes to *u jaŋliwɔŋ u kʰaŋliwɔmuni ne*.

3.3 Phonotatic constraint

Language games are bound to certain phonological constraints, just the way language puts some constraints even on prosaic phonology. We have seen how the do models of twisting rhymes of syllables work well for different kinds of syllabication albeit so with certain constraints. The typical constraint is due to rhyme harmony. For example, when the two syllables of a disyllabic word share the same rhymes as in the following examples, then there is some kind of unusual move.

?*[kʰa.na] 'to tell' → [kʰa.na]
?*[kʰap.nap] 'stingy' → [kʰap.nap]

It is to be noted that rhyme-switching takes place among the first syllable and the second syllable but since their rhymes belong to, or share the same sound(s), the result is not very impressive and hence, it does not serve the purpose: after switching the sequence remains unaltered. This constraint applies to trisyllabic and polysyllabic words as well. As in the case of trisyllabic word, if the second and third syllables share the same rhyme and in the case of compounds or phrases or sentences contains four syllables, if the second and fourth syllables share the same rhyme. For example, the twist in the example of 'black bed' is not very successful as the rhymes of the second and the last syllable share the same sounds or cluster of sounds, but 'yellow bed' is well disguised as the rhymes of these syllables belongs to different sounds.

?* [palɔŋwa-jɔŋ]'black bed' → [palɔŋwa-jɔŋ]
[palɔŋwa-stɛm] 'yellow bed' → [palɛmwa-stɔŋ]

Another type of phonological constraint here is a distributional one. As we have seen that Pnar has a number of sesquisyllabic word structures. In Pnar, a sesquisyllabic word is a combination of a minor and major syllable and the norm is that minor syllable always precedes major syllable, but in such case, if we shift the rhymes of these syllables the minor would come to the last and the major towards the initial position. It is possible to surmise the switch but the native speakers' intuition doesn't really permit this switching. The native speakers, though they do not explicitly know the phonological rules of the language, yet they seem to have intuitive knowledge of it. In many cases, sesquisyllabic word structures are avoided for switching, unless the minor syllable is in a position of not affecting them.

e.g. ?[tɨndaŋ] 'to grind' → [taŋdɨn]

4. Conclusion

Many languages around the world make use of the language game for so many reasons; to have fun, to conceal, or for academic activities. However as we can see their function would not be the same. As this paper vaguely entitled or simultaneously uses the concepts of *language game* and *secret language*, is to justify on the notion of this term. Both the terms are indeed different from one another and function differently, however they are only pragmatically different. The difference they convey in Pnar is in the function rather than the form. Not all Pnar speakers know this form of speech. Very few could comprehend immediately what is being said. Therefore,

it is used simultaneously as a secret language and normal language. Another interesting aspect of Pnar language game/ secret language is its uniqueness. Begamihl (1989) proposes the taxonomy of reversing games into four primary categories; viz, *(i) transposing games, (ii) interchange games, (iii) exchange games, and (iv) total reversing games*, but interestingly, though closely similar, language game of Pnar does not fall into any of these categories. If we think in typological terms, the future research direction would be the one where we study anomalies of the language-games and come up with a more refined typology. For now, this paper illustrates the otherness or peculiarity of the Pnar language-games.

COLOPHON

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NOTES

1 People's Linguistic Survey of India, Volume 19, Part II, The languages of Meghalaya.

2 Vowel length is not phonemic in Jowai-Pnar, however, all vowels that occur in the final position of a word tend to be longer than the ones in any other environments

3 Phonemically, there is no such syllabic construction in Pnar. However, phonetically, there are number of them as a minor syllable, such as [cʰe?.riŋ.ku] 'lizard', [ra.min.dɔ?/ 'an edible leaf', etc.

4 The term was first coined by Matisoff (1973) for the type of structure intermediate between monosyllabic and disyllabic, meaning 'one-and a half syllable. In the analysis of this paper, I would also bring the concepts of minor and major syllables discussed by Shorto (1960) which closely corresponds to the concept of Matisoff's sesquisyllabic word structure. These types of syllabic structure has been called *presyllable* or *minor syllable* in some of the earlier work on Monkhmer languages.

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