

Badaga Phonology

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The Badaga language is spoken throughout the Nilgiri hills of Tamil nadu, which is situated between Mysore and Coimbatore. The people who speak the Badaga language are estimated nearly two lakhs. The Badaga language belongs to the group of languages which has been called the Dravidian family. Tamil, Kannada, Telugu, Malayalam, Tulu, Kodagu, Badaga, etc., are the chief members of this Dravidian family. Badaga has no alphabet and literature.

“Not only do the Western Ghats separate Malayalam from Tamil, they are also home to several of the non-literary South Dravidian languages. Communities speaking Badaga, Kota, Irula and Toda live in and around the Nilgiri Mountains, a branch of the Western Ghats that rises sharply above the Coimbatore Gap. Relatively isolated from the mainstream of traditional Indian society, the Todas. Kotas and Badagas have over many generations developed close economic ties, even while speaking different languages” (Sanford B. Steever 1998: 6).

Vowels

Front	Central	Back
i ī		u ū
e ē		o ō
	a ā	

In Badaga the long vowels contrast with the corresponding short vowels

naḍu - to plant	nāḍu - country
kīru - continuous rain	kīru - to tear
sūri - to pour	sūri - penknife
melle - slowly	mēlle - cauldron
more - complaint	mōre - the face

It is to be noted here that in the Dravidian languages the long vowels contrast with the corresponding short vowels. This distinction exists especially in the four literary languages, i.e., Tamil, Kannada, Telugu and Malayalam.

In brief we can say that Badaga has five vowel phonemes (a, e, i, o, u) which occur both short and long.

Diphthongs

Diphthongs, ai and au have a place in the alphabets of the four Dravidian literary languages. In the same way, there is a chance to have the two diphthongs with Badaga alphabets. But, the diphthongs ai, au are in reality with ay and av respectively.

ai = ay :

aidu, aydu - five; aiya, ayya – grand father

au = av :

auve, avve - mother; auvu, avvuvu - to weep

“The two diphthongs ai and au are best treated not as unit phonemes, but should be rather structurally interpreted as sequences of ay and au” (Kamil V. Zvelebil 1990: 2).

Consonants

	Lab.	Lab.Dent.	Dent. Alv.	Ret.	Pal.	Vel.	Glo.
Stop voiceless	p		t	ʈ	c	k	
Stop voiced	b		d	ɖ	j	g	
Nasal	m		n	ɳ	ɲ	ŋ	
Sibiliant				s			h
Semi vowel (continuant)		v			y		
Liquid				r			
Lateral				l	ɭ		

Initials

All the vowels occur in the initial position

a	-	alli	- there
ā	-	āga	- then
i	-	ima	- he, this man
ī	-	īsu	- to get

u	-	uri	-	sweat
ū	-	ūlāṭṭa	-	quarrel
e	-	eṭṭu	-	eight
ē	-	ēṭṭa	-	beat
o	-	ode	-	roof
ō	-	ōḍe	-	bamboo

In Badaga the retroflex sounds ṭ, ḍ, ṇ, ḷ, and alveolar r and l do not occur in the initial position of a word. However, they come to the word initial position in borrowed words. Similarly, among the nasal group ṅ and ṇ do not occur in the initial position of a word

The velar nasal ṅ occurs only before velar voiced and voiceless stops. Viz., g, k. Similarly, the palatal nasal ṇ occurs only before palatal voiced and voiceless stops. Viz., c, j

The dental nasal n is pronounced as alveolar nasal while it is doubled in the middle position or in the initial position of a word. So, it is understood that, it is pronounced as dental nasal before the dental t, d.

All consonants except r can occur as single or double, but this letter never doubled. Exception to this rule, in a rare occasion, the word mare(hide) is pronounced as marre. Similarly, the sibilant letter s, and h cannot occur double and also among the nasal group ṅ and ṇ are never doubled

In Badaga the voiced consonant contrast with corresponding voiceless consonant

In initial position

kaṭṭu - to binding	gaṭṭu -wealth
cāḍi - tale-bearing	jāḍi -big basket
taṭṭu - to strike	daṭṭu - stalk
paṭṭu - towel	baṭṭu - skill

In middle position

akka - elder sister	agga - rope
accu - mould	ajju – to immerse
gatti - strong	gaddi - small stick
mette - fenugreek	medde - bed
kappu - black	kabbu - sugarcane

Among the consonants k, g, c, j, t, d, p, b, h, s, n, m, y, r, and l are found occur in the initial position. But there are some restrictions in the occurrence of the following sounds and they are enumerated below.

k occurs before all vowels in the initial position.

- k+a kappe - frog
 ā kāve - channel
 i kidi - to divide
 ī kīye - below
 u kullu - mark
 ū kūḍu - to marry
 e keppu - red
 ē kēḍi - rouge
 o kome - rotten
 ō kōḍi - corner

g occurs before all vowels in the initial position

- g+a - gaṇḍa - husband
 ā - gāḍi - wheel
 i - giḍu - plant
 ī - gīvu - pus
 u - guy - pit
 ū - gūḍe - basket
 e - gelasa - work
 ē - gēna - remembrance
 o - golla - beggar
 ō - gōḷḷu - corner

c occurs before all vowels in the initial position

- c+a - cappe - flat
 a - cāḍi - gossip
 i - cillu - branch
 ī - cīra - bag
 u - cuṭṭi - ginger
 ū - cūru - smell
 e - cellu - to throw
 ē - ceru - mud
 o - coṭakku - to drop
 ō - cōlu - to be defeated

c and s are in free variation and mostly s is preferred instead c.

j occurs before all vowels in the initial position

- j+a -jallu - pole
 ā - jāḍi - basket

i - jille - stick to support creeping or climbing plant
 ī - jīna - miser
 u - juṭṭu - spike of grass
 ū - jūju - bet
 e - jena -day
 ē - jēnu - honey
 o - joḷḷu – husk
 ō - jōlu - maize

t occurs initially with all the vowels

t+a - tamma - younger brother
 ā - tāve - fern
 i - tiṅguva - moon
 ī - tīṭṭu - pollution
 u – tuḍi - lip
 ū- tūkku - to lift
 e - teḷḷu - to swift
 ē - tēru - chariot
 o - toṭṭi - bucket
 ō - tōṭṭa - field

d occurs initially with all the vowels

d+a - daḍi - stick
 ā - dāṭṭu - to cross
 i - diṃbe - bundle
 ī - dīvige - lamp
 u - dukka - sorrow
 ū - dūve - graveyard
 e - dese - luck
 ē - dēvaru - god
 o - doḷḷa - proper name
 ō - doḷḷu - bulkiness

n occurs initially with all the vowels

n+a - nali - to play
 ā - nālu - shadow
 i - niṅga - you
 ī - nīru - water
 u - nuṅgu - to swallow
 ū - nūlu - thread

e - netti - forehead

ē - nē - dog

o - nore - foam

ō - nō - sick

p occurs initially with all the vowels

p+a - paḍi- step(stone)

ā - pāme - tale

i - piḷḷu - lane

ī - pīlu - lean

u - puṭṭi - bottle

ū - pūra - entire

e - pela - strength

ē - pēre - buttermilk

o - pottu - to smear

ō - pōttu - beef

p occurs initially with all the vowels

b+a - balli - wage

ā - bāḍu - mutton

i - bikku - to sob

ī - bīkkuri - shocking

u - buḍu - to leave

ū - būtta - glutton

e - beṇṇe - butter

ē - bēṭṭe - hunting

o - boṇḍi - buttock

ō - bōna - a small vessel

m occurs initially with all the vowels

m+a - maḷḷu - lap

ā - māru - to sell

i - miḍi - heel

ī - mīnu - fish

u - muḷḷu - thorn

ū - mūṅga - dumb

e - melle - slow

ē - mēle - on

o - moga - face

ō - mōḍa - cloud

h occurs initially with all the vowels except ī

h+a - haṭṭi – village

ā - hālu - milk

I - hiṭṭu - meal

u - huli - tiger

ū - hū - flower

e - heṅga - daughters

ē - hēnu - louse

o - holla - bad

ō - hōgu - to go

Of late, mostly the h sound is missing and the vowel which is with h is pronounced. E.g. olla instead holla

s occurs initially with all the vowels

s+a - saḷḷe - trouble

ā - sāla - debt

i - sinna - gold

ī - sīra - bag

u - suli - to peel

ū - sūla - trouble

e - seḍe - ladle

ē - sēkke - worm

o - sose - daughter-in-law

ō - sōsu - to close

s and c are in free variation and mostly s is preferred instead c.

y occurs initially with the vowel ā

y+ā - yāma - who

r occurs initially with the vowel a, ā

r+a - raṭṭu - bedsheet

ā - rāṭṭe - pulley

l occurs initially with the vowel a, ā, e, ē, ō

l+a - laccumi - feminine proper noun

ā - lāba - gain

e - lekka - count

ē - lēsu - light

ō - lōkka - world

Finals

Virtually all words end in vowels, words may end in certain nasals and liquids as well. E.g. kaṇ - eye, kal- stone, kaḷ - toddy. At the same time, these consonant final words are pronounced with vowel endings as kaṇṇu, kallu, kaḷḷu, respectively

Among vowels a, ā, i, u, ū, e occur in the word final position

- a -habba - festival
- ā -ima tā - this he(emphasis)
- i -āṇi - nail
- u -kaccu - to bite
- ū -hū - flower
- e -katte - ass

No consonant occurs in the final position. Always the enunciative vowels occupy the final position.

Clusters

Consonant clusters

There are no clusters in word-initial or word-final position. So, the clusters occur medially.

Medial two consonant clusters occur in the native and in non-native words

- kk- -hakke - bed
- gg- -taggu - to reduce
- cc- -ucce - urine
- jj- -ajja- old man
- ṭṭ- -aṭṭu - cleft
- ḍḍ- -baḍḍi - interest
- tt- -gattu - neck
- dd- -udda - height
- pp- -kappu - black
- bb- -gobbara - manure
- ṇṇ- -maṇṇu - soil
- nn- -sanni - delirium
- yy- -ayya- grandfather
- vv- -avve- mother
- ll- -olla - bad
- ḷḷ- -haḷḷa - river
- ṅṅ- -kāṅge - heat
- ñj- -hañji - cotton
- ṇḍ- -baṇḍi - cart
- nd- -manda - village assembly
- mb- -ombattu - nine
- yk- -kuykatti - sharp sickle

-rc-	-karcu - expenditure
-lm-	-mēlmane - upper house
-rl-	-barlu- broom
-ls-	-gelsa - work
-ṭl-	-kaṭlu - cot
-yd-	-bāmayda - brother-in-law
-vg-	-avguli - crying (babe)
-nc-	-ancu - to cause to fear
-rs-	-harsu - bless
-rc-	-korcu - to call

Bibliography

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Abbreviation

Lab.	- Labial
Lab.Dent.	- Labio-dental
Dent.	- Dental
Alv.	-Alveolar
Ret.	-Retroflex
Pal.	-Palatal
Vel.	-Vellar
Glo.	-Glottal