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Languages and Peoples of the Eastern Himalayan Region (LPEHR)

Assimilation in Maring

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ABSTRACT

Assimilation is a phonological process in which a sound becomes more like its neighboring sound. This process can occur either within a word or in between words and is of two types depending upon its directionality –regressive or progressive. Maring exhibits total contact regressive assimilation within word boundary. This is a prevalent morphophonological phenomenon that affects the formation of perfect aspect *-kur* and genitive case marker *-jəi*. For instance, if a verb ends with *-ŋ* the perfect aspect will become *-ŋur*, if it ends with *-l* then the perfect aspect will become *-lur* and so on. The same process is applicable with the genitive case marker *-jəi*. If the noun, i.e. the possessor ends with *-m* or *-n* or *-r* then *-jəi* will become *-məi*, *-nəi* and *-rəi* respectively. These changes occur in reference to all the verbs and nouns (the possessors). The target sounds change completely in reference to its preceding segment for facilitating a smooth, effortless and economical task of utterance. This paper will discuss in detail the cause of the assimilation, the rules and constraints, and the various implications the process has on the language, the speakers and second language learner.

KEYWORDS

Maring, morphophonemic process, total contact regressive assimilation, language change

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*Assimilation in Maring*¹

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1 Introduction of the language

Maring is a lesser known Tibeto-Burman language spoken by the Maring community settled in the southeastern part of Manipur. The name is derived from *mei* (fire) and *ring* (alive), and has the denoted meaning of “people who keeps fire alive or unquenched”. There are about 26,424 speakers as per the 2011 Census of India from a number of 68 villages scattered mostly in Tengoupal district and a few in Chandel and Thoubal districts of Manipur. Maring speakers are mostly bilingual as almost everyone can speak Meiteilon, not just because it is the lingua-franca of the state, but more because of the trade and commerce it maintains with the Meitei on a daily basis. Younger generation however can speak English and Hindi as a result of modern education and globalization. Church sermons and local gatherings are carried out in their village dialects, schooling is carried out either in Meitei or English.

Maring has similarities to both Kuki-Chin and Tangkhul languages. It is surrounded by Tangkhul on the north; Moyon, Moshang, Lamkang, Aimol and Anal etc in the south and Meiteilon in the West. Interactions between Maring and these languages take place in Meiteilon which is the lingua franca of the state. Most Maring speakers are fluent in Meitei because of the trade and commerce which takes place between the two communities on a daily basis. On the other hand, Maring maintains a cordial and social relationship with the Southern Tangkhul because of intermarriages and cultural similarities. In fact, some of the few villages bordering the Maring area like Nambasi and Kashung, share linguistic affinity with Lamyangnga i.e. the Mongmi² variety. However, the direction of language influence is yet to be confirmed as the genetic relation of this language group is still unclear. Thus, because of having similarities with Kuki-Chin, Tangkhul and sometimes with Meitei, the classification of Maring at lower subgroup level is still uncertain. For instance, Grierson (1903) places Maring under the sub-division of the Naga group of the Naga-Kuki subgroup. Benedict (1972:10) claims it to be a transitional Tangkhul-Kuki type language.

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² The term Mongmi came into being in 2005, earlier they were known as Lamyang or Ramyang or Saibu.

Mortensen (2003:8) reiterates Grierson’s opinion and states that Maring acts like a bridge between the Tangkhul languages and the Kuki-Chin languages because it has more lexical similarity with the Kuki-Chin

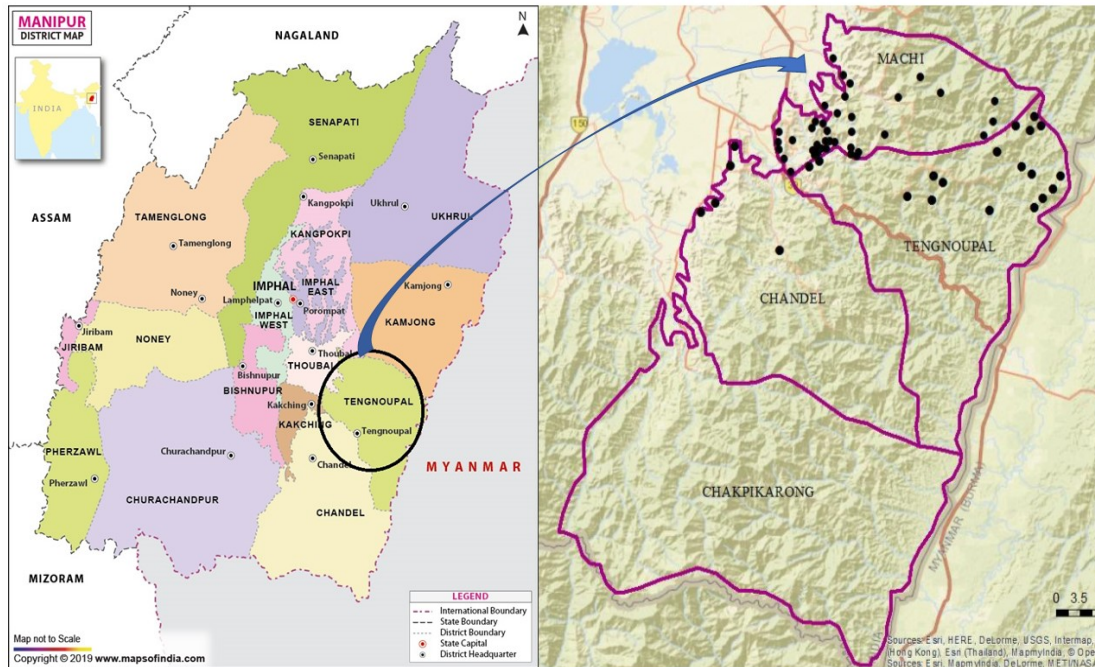


Fig 1: Map locating Maring villages

languages than the Tangkhul language, though it lacks the characteristic features of Kuki-Chin such as stem alternation and pronominal clitics marking subject agreement. Burling (2003:187) claims that Maring is closer to Tangkhul, but later on said that the similarities might have probably developed as a result of contact, and that there is an equal possibility to align Maring with the languages of Northwest Kuki-Chin (Post and Burling 2017:238).

Maring does not have a script of its own, rather the younger generation uses the Roman script as they are brought up in English medium education, but the older generation prefer Devanagri script because of their exposure to schooling in Meiteilon. Maring is not yet taught in schools and colleges, though preparation is being made at the moment to implement it at primary school level. Depending upon the geographical division and contact with other neighboring languages, there are three language varieties used by the communities belonging to Maring tribe. They are Khoibu (Uipo), Ramyang (Mongmi) and Maring, which can further be divided into the following sub-varieties:

- (i) Daklhangnga
- (ii) Khotlhaiya
- (iii) Marimchiya

This paper will discuss the assimilation process found in the Maring standard variety, i.e. the Lamlong variety.

2 Assimilation and its types

Assimilation can be of various types depending on several dimensions such as the consonants or vowels being the triggers or target of assimilation, the features that are being assimilated, and to which direction and to what distance etc. Based on these, three fundamental aspects are used for determining assimilation given below:

1. Trigger and target:

The sound whose feature(s) is being spread over to, or is initiating change is known as the trigger of assimilation. Whereas, the sound that undergoes change or took over the features of the trigger is known as the target of assimilation.

2. Directionality:

This is the direction in which the sound change takes place, whether a sound becomes more like the sound that precedes it or the sound that follows it (Katamba 1989:84). If a sound becomes more like the sound preceding it then we have backward or regressive or anticipatory (Crystal 2008:27) assimilation. If the sound changes on the influence of the sound following it, then we have the progressive or forward assimilation.

3. Domain of assimilation:

The domain is the unit where assimilation is confined. When the target and trigger of an assimilation is within a syllable, then the syllable becomes the domain of assimilation. An example can be mentioned of Sudanese nasalization, where any vowel following a nasal sonorant becomes nasalized. But sometimes assimilation can take place across domains, it can happen within morphemes, across morphemes and across word boundaries.

Thus, assimilation is also a part of phonotactics as it looks at the rules that govern sound combination within syllables and words of a particular language or dialects. Depending upon the three intersecting dichotomies mentioned above, assimilation can be of the following types:

- a) Total or partial assimilation
- b) Contact or distant assimilation
- c) Regressive (Right to Left), progressive (Left to Right) and reciprocal assimilation (bidirectional).

If a target sound changes entirely to become identical to its trigger by taking all of its phonetic features, then we have a total assimilation. The assimilation will be partial if the target sound acquires some traits of the trigger but does not fully become identical to it. If a sound change is a result of direct influence with the trigger, then it is known as contact assimilation. However, if the change is a result of a trigger which is not in direct contact with the target but further away from it, then such types are known as distant assimilation.

Progressive assimilation takes place when the target changes to the sound following it, i.e. towards forward direction. The change is regressive assimilation if the target becomes

more like the preceding sound, i.e. towards backward direction. The assimilation is reciprocal when there is a fusion between the target and the trigger as a result of mutual influence. The interaction of the parameters of classification above give rise to the following combination types:

1. Total contact regressive assimilation
2. Total contact progressive assimilation
3. Partial contact regressive assimilation
4. Partial contact progressive assimilation
5. Distant (non-adjacent) assimilation

The following sections will discuss in detail the types of assimilation process that Maring exhibit at morphophonological level and will highly the cause, along with the formulated rules and constrains and its implication on the language speaker and learners.

3 Assimilation process in Maring

Maring is highly productive in consonant assimilation. Maring have total contact regressive³ assimilation (TCRA) based on voicing assimilation rule. This TCRA effects the formation of perfect aspect *-kur* and genitive case marker *-jəi*, depending upon the sound of vowels and consonants ending the verb and the noun. For instance, if a verb ends with /ŋ/, the perfect aspect will become *-ŋur*, if it ends with /m/, the perfect aspect will become *-mur* and so on (see table 1 and 2). If the word ends with /k/, then the genitive marking will be *-kəi* and if it ends with /n/, the genitive case will be *-nəi* (see stable 6). In case of verb and noun ending with vowels (see table 4, 5,7,8) the assimilated forms take the features back or front of the vowel that triggers them. This gives rise to many allomorphs, which at times confuses not just the language learners but also the native speakers. This section will discuss in details the ways in which assimilation work in the language and help get a better picture of the discrepancies following the confusion.

3.1 Assimilation of the perfect aspect -kur

Perfect aspect is used for indicating an action that has been carried out and relates the action to a particular time reference, be it past, present or future. In Maring it is marked by the suffix *-kur*.

³ This is in accordance with Katamba's (1989:84) direction of assimilation wherein the target becomes the focus of change from which directionality is measured. This is different from the directionality of scholars like Campbell (1999), Crystal (2008) and Gordon (2016) where directionality is seen alternatively from the point of the trigger. So, if seen from this perspective, Maring have progressive assimilation as the change is coming from the trigger preceding the target.

- 1) *pawa-ne* *kəi-ja* *niŋsun-nəŋ* *lailik* *pa-mək-nəi*
 father-ERG 1SG-ACC morning-*nəŋ* book read-NEG-cause

um-kur

beat-PRF

'Father beat me in the morning for not studying.'

- 2) *məje-tʰud-kur* *lailik* *a* *1986* *kum-ra* *pʰoŋ-kur*
 write-out-PRF book this 1986 year-LOC publish-PRF

'This book which was written was published in 1986.'

- 3) *čur-baŋ-kur* *lhouram* *həi* *čim-mək*
 touch-held-PRF work that right-NEG

'The work that has been carried out is not right.'

In the above examples, the perfect aspect describes actions that have started in the past and ended in the past. Say for instance, 'morning' in (1) and '1986' in (2). In case of (3), the time reference is unknown; it might probably have taken place yesterday, or last week, or month or year. But the action has been completed by the time it is described. As such the described action is given a past time reference, or remote past, and it is marked by the verbal suffix *-kur*.

- 4) *cak* *tʰuŋ-ŋur-ra* *ko*
 food cook-PRF-REAL QP

'Have (you) cooked?'

- 5) *tʰuŋ-ləi-hui*
 cook-PROG-still

'Still cooking'

- 6) *moi* *tʰuŋ-ŋur-ra*
 yes cook-PRF-REAL

'(Yes) I have (already) cooked.'

However, in examples (4-6), the action described is in a present timeline, in the sense that the speakers are talking about an action that his happening then and there. So, cooking might have already started, and is still going on (5), or finished maybe a while ago or so (6), i.e. either immediate or recent past, but in a present setting. In case of examples (7-8), the perfect aspect is in a future timeline marked by irrealis suffix *-rəu*, for indicating an action that is yet to take place.

- 7) *nəi-jəi* *liŋlit* *a* *temui-nuŋ* *pi-jur-rəu-wa*
 2SG-GEN shirt this temui-DAT give-PRF-IRR-ASRT
 ‘Your shirt will be given to Temui!’
- 8) *na* *cimmai* *cak-ca-kalnəŋ* *ka-ri* *ip-bur-ra-rəu*
 2PL family food-eat-ADV.time 1PL-TOP sleep-PRF-REAL-IRR
 ‘(By the time) your family eat food; we will (already) be asleep.’

Thus, we can see that perfect aspect *-kur* is the underlined representation, and does not get assimilated in a past time reference (1-3), but only in the case of present (4,6) and future (7-8) time reference. The followings sections will address the morphophonemic changes that the perfect aspect *-kur* undergo when it is in present timeline, i.e. present perfect form.

3.1.1 Word structure with CVC or VC

If a verb ends with a consonant (C¹), then consonant assimilation takes place, wherein the perfect aspect *-k* will take on the entire feature of the trigger, i.e. is the sound preceding it. So, for instance, if the verb ends with *-m* or *-n* the perfect aspect will become either *-mur* or *-nur* instead of *-kur*. See table given below for more examples:

Source word	Assimilation	Output	Glossary
<i>lum + kur</i>	$k \rightarrow m/m_$	<i>lummur-ra</i>	warmed
<i>mən + kur</i>	$k \rightarrow n/n_$	<i>mənnur-ra</i>	caught
<i>lal+ kur</i>	$k \rightarrow l/l_$	<i>lal-lur-ra</i>	wronged
<i>t^huŋ + kur</i>	$k \rightarrow \eta/\eta_$	<i>t^huŋŋur-ra</i>	closed
<i>um + kur</i>	$k \rightarrow m/m_$	<i>ummur-ra</i>	beaten
<i>huŋ + kur</i>	$k \rightarrow \eta/\eta_$	<i>huŋŋur-ra</i>	returned

Table 1: /k/ → C¹/C¹_

From the examples above we can see that the suffix *-kur* agrees in voicing with the preceding sound. The target /k/ is changing into various allomorph forms depending up the features of the immediate triggers (C¹) preceding it and acquires its entire features. Thus, the perfect aspect suffix is realized by a voiced consonant since the verb ends in a voiced segment, giving rise to various allomorphs of /kur/ such as [mur], [nur], [lur], [ŋur] etc.

Hence, /k/ → [m, n, l, η]/C¹_

If we observe this phenomenon from the perspective of distinctive features, it is evident that there is a process of voicing assimilation taking place, where the voiceless velar stop /k/ changes into voiced consonants when it is preceded by any voiced consonant. This means that syllable initial voiceless unaspirated stops become voiced between voiced segments.

i.e. /k/ → C¹/C¹_

In case of verbs ending with a voiceless segment, the perfect aspect will be realized by a voiceless consonant. However, the examples given below speaks differently (See table 2). The reason for this can be explained by reapplying the assimilation theory again, that is, since the entire point of assimilation process is for facilitating “smooth, effortless and economical transition from one sound to another” (Katamba 1989:80), voicing should either be turn on and keep on throughout or not turn on at all, rather than alternately turning it on or off part-way through a sequence of sounds (Katamba 1989:81). And since Maring have more words (or verbs) ending with voiced sounds than that of voiceless ones, the voicing assimilation rule becomes more stronger than the devoicing rule.

Source word	Assimilation	Output	Glossary
<i>ip + kur</i>	<i>k → b/p_</i>	<i>ibbur-ra</i>	slept
<i>lep + kur</i>	<i>k → b/p_</i>	<i>lebbur-ra</i>	peeled
<i>təp + kur</i>	<i>k → b/p_</i>	<i>təbbur-ra</i>	slowed
<i>čut + kur</i>	<i>k → d/t_</i>	<i>čuddur-ra</i>	left
<i>tət + kur</i>	<i>k → d/t_</i>	<i>təddur-ra</i>	torn (cloths)

Table 2: /k/ → C¹/C¹_

Therefore, in case of case of verb ending with voiceless consonants like /p/ and /t/ another voicing rule is applied to change the target from voiceless to its voiced counterpart, resulting in the examples above. Such change takes place in order to facilitate a smooth, effortless and economical task of utterance. It makes the process of speaking easier by easing the articulation pressures, by making pronunciation easier and by saving the time required in producing different sounds.

But if the verb ends with /k/ then *-kur* remains the same (see table 3). This is probably because there is no /g/ sound, the voiced counterpart of /k/, in Maring.

Source word	Assimilation	Output	Glossary
<i>pak + kur</i>	$k \rightarrow k/k_$	<i>pakkur-ra</i>	flattened
<i>căk + kur</i>	$k \rightarrow k/k_$	<i>căkkur-ra</i>	burned
<i>dik + kur</i>	$k \rightarrow k/k_$	<i>dikkur-ra</i>	broken (long object)
<i>mek + kur</i>	$k \rightarrow k/k_$	<i>mekkur-ra</i>	itched
<i>cek + kur</i>	$k \rightarrow k/k_$	<i>cekkur-ra</i>	split

Table 3: /k/ → k/k_

3.1.2 Words with CV or CVV structure

In case of verbs ending with vowel sounds, the target sound /k/ changes either to [j] or [w] depending upon the feature front and back of the vowel. If the trigger vowel is a front vowel such as /i/ and /e/, then /k/ changes to [j] (see table 4). But if the trigger is a back vowel such as /u/, /o/ and even central /a/ which is not a front vowel, then /k/ will change to [w] (see table 5).

Source word	Assimilation	Output	Glossary
<i>hi + kur</i>	$k \rightarrow j/i_$	<i>hi-jur-ra</i>	died
<i>pi + kur</i>	$k \rightarrow j/i_$	<i>pi-jur-ra</i>	given
<i>ruj + kur</i>	$k \rightarrow j/i_$	<i>ruj-jur-ra</i>	carried
<i>lui + kur</i>	$k \rightarrow j/i_$	<i>lui-jur-ra</i>	finished
<i>mai + kur</i>	$k \rightarrow j/i_$	<i>mai-jur-ra</i>	eaten
<i>mani + kur</i>	$k \rightarrow j/i_$	<i>məni-jur-ra</i>	won
<i>me + kur</i>	$k \rightarrow j/e_$	<i>me-jur-ra</i>	darked
<i>le + kur</i>	$k \rightarrow j/e_$	<i>le-jur-ra</i>	shirt being inside-out

Table 4: /k/ → j/V_

Source word	Assimilation	Output	Glossary
<i>bu + kur</i>	$k \rightarrow w/u_$	<i>bu-wur-ra</i>	asked
<i>su + kur</i>	$k \rightarrow w/u_$	<i>su-wur-ra</i>	washed
<i>mu + kur</i>	$k \rightarrow w/u_$	<i>mu-wur-ra</i>	saw
<i>lo + kur</i>	$k \rightarrow w/o_$	<i>lo-wur-ra</i>	bought
<i>ro + kur</i>	$k \rightarrow w/o_$	<i>ro-wur-ra</i>	enough
<i>pa + kur</i>	$k \rightarrow w/a_$	<i>pa-wur-ra</i>	read
<i>p^ha + kur</i>	$k \rightarrow w/a_$	<i>p^ha-wur-ra</i>	found
<i>ca + kur</i>	$k \rightarrow w/a_$	<i>ca-wur-ra</i>	eaten
<i>sa + kur</i>	$k \rightarrow w/a_$	<i>sa-wur-ra</i>	hot
<i>la + kur</i>	$k \rightarrow w/a_$	<i>la-wur-ra</i>	tired
<i>na + kur</i>	$k \rightarrow w/a_$	<i>na-wur-ra</i>	sick

<i>wa + kur</i>	<i>k</i> → <i>w/a_</i>	<i>wa-wur-ra</i>	gone
<i>ja + kur</i>	<i>k</i> → <i>w/a_</i>	<i>ja-wur-ra</i>	agree

Table 5: /k/ → w/V_

3.2 Assimilation of the genitive marker *-jəi*

The same assimilation pattern described above for the perfect aspect *-kur* is also applicable for the genitive marker *-jəi* which too changes in accordance with the sound end of the noun, i.e. the possessor. Also, the change is dependent upon whether the noun ends with a consonant or with a vowel. However, unlike *-kur*, that gets assimilated depending upon time line reference, *-jəi* is the underlined representation that gets assimilated solely for the purpose of easy articulation and economic transition. And so, if speaker wants to be grammatically right, or talk slow or is baby talking, then they will use the non-assimilated or the underlined form. Otherwise, in normal conversation speakers usually prefer to assimilate their speech for easy articulation.

3.2.1 Words with CVC or VC syllabic structure

If the noun ends with a consonant sounds like /n/, /m/, /r/, /ŋ/ etc, then the target /j/ gets the entire features of the consonant sound preceding it and assimilates totally to become a consonant.

Source	Assimilation	Output	Glossary
<i>modun + jəi</i>	<i>j</i> → <i>n/_n</i>	<i>modun-nəi</i>	Modun's
<i>patər + jəi</i>	<i>j</i> → <i>r/_r</i>	<i>patər-rəi</i>	Grandfather's
<i>ətunŋ + jəi</i>	<i>j</i> → <i>ŋ/_ŋ</i>	<i>ətunŋ-ŋəi</i>	Atun's
<i>tolk^həm + jəi</i>	<i>j</i> → <i>m/_m</i>	<i>tolk^həm-məi</i>	Tolham's
<i>medar + jəi</i>	<i>j</i> → <i>r/_r</i>	<i>medar-rəi</i>	Medar's
<i>kot^hil + jəi</i>	<i>j</i> → <i>l/_l</i>	<i>kot^hil-ləi</i>	Kothil's
<i>čim + jəi</i>	<i>j</i> → <i>m/_m</i>	<i>cim-məi</i>	house's
<i>k^həd + jəi</i>	<i>j</i> → <i>d/_d</i>	<i>k^həd-dəi</i>	one's
<i>kum~kum + jəi</i>	<i>j</i> → <i>m/_m</i>	<i>kum-məi</i>	year's
<i>kəit^hel + jəi</i>	<i>j</i> → <i>l/_l</i>	<i>kəit^hel-ləi</i>	market's
<i>kərunŋ + jəi</i>	<i>j</i> → <i>ŋ/_ŋ</i>	<i>kərunŋ-ŋəi</i>	king's
<i>t^hlaipəŋ + jəi</i>	<i>j</i> → <i>ŋ/_ŋ</i>	<i>t^hlaipəŋ-ŋəi</i>	world's
<i>lim + jəi</i>	<i>j</i> → <i>m/_m</i>	<i>lim-məi</i>	union's
<i>ləipak + jəi</i>	<i>j</i> → <i>k/_k</i>	<i>ləipak-kəi</i>	land's or soil's

Table 6: /j/ → C/C_

3.2.2 Words with CV or V syllabic structure

Similar to section 3.1.2 where /k/ changes to /j/ or /w/ depending the feature front and back of vowels, the genitive marker *-jəi* also changes either to /w/ if it preceded by /o/ and /u/ (table 8), but remain unchanged if preceded by /i/, /e/ and /a/ (table 7).

Source	Assimilation	Output	Glossary
<i>pipi + jəi</i>	$j \rightarrow j/i_$	<i>pipi-jəi</i>	pipi's
<i>nini + jəi</i>	$j \rightarrow j/i_$	<i>nini-jəi</i>	aunty's (father sister)
<i>əŋŋi + jəi</i>	$j \rightarrow j/i_$	<i>əŋŋi-jəi</i>	yesterday's
<i>tete + jəi</i>	$j \rightarrow j/e_$	<i>tete-jəi</i>	tete's
<i>pepe + jəi</i>	$j \rightarrow j/e_$	<i>pepe-jəi</i>	pepe's
<i>meme + jəi</i>	$j \rightarrow j/e_$	<i>meme-jəi</i>	meme's
<i>a + jəi</i>	$j \rightarrow j/a_$	<i>a-jəi</i>	his/her
<i>papa + jəi</i>	$j \rightarrow j/a_$	<i>papa-jəi</i>	father's

Table 7: /j/ → j/V_

Source	Assimilation	Output	Glossary
<i>toto + jəi</i>	$j \rightarrow w/o_$	<i>toto-wəi</i>	toto's
<i>koko + jəi</i>	$j \rightarrow w/o_$	<i>koko-wəi</i>	koko's
<i>momo + jəi</i>	$j \rightarrow w/o_$	<i>momo-wəi</i>	momo's
<i>əŋtu + jəi</i>	$j \rightarrow w/u_$	<i>əŋtu-wəi</i>	today's
<i>ju + jəi</i>	$j \rightarrow w/u_$	<i>ju-wəi</i>	rat's
<i>hu + jəi</i>	$j \rightarrow w/u_$	<i>hu-wəi</i>	whose

Table 8: /j/ → w/V_

3.2.3 Words with CV or V syllabic structure

In case of loan words borrowed or added into the lexicon of the language, the assimilation process adheres to the phonotactic constraints of Maring. So, for instance, if the possessor has an English, Hindi or Meitei names like 'John', 'Sundari' and 'Abem', then the genitive marker *-jəi* will simply become *-nəi*, *-jəi* and *-məi* respectively, following the usual assimilation pattern. The same process is applicable for other nouns, apart from personal names, like 'school', 'TV', 'phone', 'table' etc. However, in case of loan words which have sound endings that doesn't follow the phonotactic constraints of the language, such as 'church', 'fridge', 'office', or even personal names like 'Moses', 'Rose', 'Isaiah' etc, the genitive marker *-jəi* remains unchanged. This is so because Maring doesn't have words ending with /c/, /s/, /h/ and /w/ and when in contact with a sound that doesn't follow the constraints of the language, no assimilation takes place.

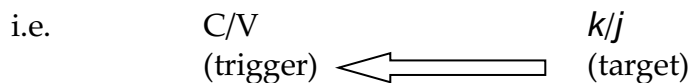
Source	Assimilation	Output	Glossary
<i>moses + jəi</i>	$j \rightarrow j/s_$	<i>moses-jəi</i>	moses's
<i>ros + jəi</i>	$j \rightarrow j/s_$	<i>ros-jəi</i>	rose's

<i>aisajaʔ + jəi</i>	$j \rightarrow j/?_$	<i>aisajaʔ-jəi</i>	Isaiah's
<i>ofis + jəi</i>	$j \rightarrow j/s_$	<i>ofis-jəi</i>	office's
<i>fridz + jəi</i>	$j \rightarrow j/z_$	<i>fridz-jəi</i>	fridge's
<i>tʃʌtʃ + jəi</i>	$j \rightarrow j/tʃ_$	<i>tʃʌtʃ-jəi</i>	church's

Table 9: /j/ → j/C_

3.3 Rule formulation

Before formulating rules for the assimilation, we need to know the structural change that is taking place by identifying which sound segment is spreading to which and then specify the phonological properties that is acquired. The perfect aspect *-kur* and genitive case marker *-jəi* get assimilated depending upon the sound segment of the verb and noun preceding them. The assimilation however is mostly dependent on the voiced feature of the trigger preceding the target. The target assimilates the entire feature, and since the direction is backward, it is regressive.



Since the /k/ of the perfect aspect suffix *-kur* and /j/ of the genitive marker *-jəi* assimilates the entire features of the sounds preceding them and becomes exactly like them, the assimilation process in Maring is total contact regressive assimilation, and it occurs within word, i.e. word-internal assimilation at the stem-suffix boundary.

Thus, on the basis of the data given above, and combining all the constraints mention above, the following rules can be formulated. The first two rules are for the aspect marker *-kur*:

$$1. \begin{matrix} C^2 & \longrightarrow & C^1/C^1_ \\ \left[\begin{matrix} -\text{syll} \end{matrix} \right] & & \end{matrix}$$

In rule no.1, non-syllabic consonant /k/ (C²) becomes syllabic consonant (C¹), when it is preceded by a syllabic consonant (C¹).

$$2. /k/ \longrightarrow \left[\begin{matrix} -\text{cons} \\ -\text{syll} \\ \alpha \text{ place} \end{matrix} \right]$$

In rule no.2, /k/ changes into a semi vowel in the alpha place when it is preceded by a vowel.

As for the genitive marker *-jəi*, the rule no.3 below is applicable, wherein /j/ change into a consonant when it is preceded by a consonant.

$$1. /j/ \longrightarrow \left(\begin{array}{l} + \text{con} \\ + \text{voice} \end{array} \right) / C_$$

In rule no.4, /j/ change either into /j/ or /w/ when it is preceded by a vowel and is dependent on the feature front and back of the vowels.

$$2. /j/ \longrightarrow \left(\begin{array}{l} - \text{con} \\ + \text{son} \end{array} \right) / V_$$

4 Conclusion

From the above observation and analysis, we can see that Maring exhibits total contact regressive assimilation (TCRA) across morpheme boundary and is dependent on the voicing rule. Therefore, in case of words having voiceless sounds as the trigger; voicing rule is applied to facilitate easy articulation (table 2). However, there are exceptional cases when speakers retain the unassimilated form of *-kur* and *-jəi*. That is purely dependent on the speaker's discretion and background, which region he comes from and what variety of language he speaks. For instance, one of the members⁴ in a group chat pointed out that the usage of *-wəi* and *-jəi* differs from village to village, and that villages like Machi, Kampang and Leibi etc use *-wəi* whereas villages like Dudu, Khunbi, Langol, Laiching etc use *-jəi*. Another participant⁵ pointed out that in his village, Korungthel, they use *-əi* instead of *-jəi* and *-wəi*. The use of *-əi* as a genitive marker is further seconded by a third person⁶ saying that in case of Uipo (Khoibu) only *-əi* is used.

Through this study we know that Maring is a language that is very prone to assimilation, or in other words prone to ease articulation. As such there is a high chance that this phenomenon could trigger other morpho-syntactic processes like the "fast speech rules" in Meiteilon (Chelliah 1994) which obliterates word and morpheme boundaries. But that will be another topic for discussion in itself. For now, this is a preliminary study showing the prevalent sound change in Maring. A further depth research and analysis of the phenomenon by mapping it region wise will be helpful for understand the history of Maring language change and the path it follows.

ABBREVIATIONS

1	first person	LOC	locative
2	second person	NEG	negative
ACC	accusative	PL	plural

⁴ Y. Monal Makunga from Langol Khunou

⁵ K MSP Charang from Korungthel village

⁶ K.H. Modar from Kambang village

ADV	adverb	PRF	perfect
ASRT	assertive	REAL	realis
DAT	dative	SG	singular
ERG	ergative	TOP	topic marker
GEN	genitive	TCRA	total contact regressive assimilation
IRR	irrealis		

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