

## **SOME NOTES ON MARAA: II**

**Lorenz G. Löffler**  
University of Zürich

### Preliminary remarks

The first part of this paper appeared in LTBA 25.1:123-136. Some minor changes have been for this part. The earlier part speaks of "Maraa", though my analysis in the first part was based on Tlóusài Maràa only. As a matter of fact, this version of Maraa is now trying to establish itself as "standard Maraa", and may also succeed in doing so, since it is supported by Lorrain's dictionary and a bible translation revised by the Maraa themselves. But linguistically speaking there is little reason to accept this restricted view. This paper expands the earlier coverage, replacing many general "Maraa" by "T" (as a shorthand for Tlóusài). This "T" will be supplemented by two additional dialects ("F" and "Z") in the following text. Although all of them still can be subsumed under "Maraa", their vocabulary cannot be united in an undifferentiated dictionary. Their vowel systems have drifted far apart, and the only way to reunite them to some extend is by reconstructing the once common basis which I will call OM (short for Old Maraa).

This is not to say that my analysis or the comparisons with Lushai and Lai in the first part were faulty. Any comparison of two major lan-

guages, however important, in reality is nothing but a comparison of two minor dialects which for whatever reason may have come to be regarded as representing the standard. Thus, given enough material, I could have started with any other "dialect" of Maraa. The results, to be sure, would have looked a little bit different, because the vowel system of these dialects is different from that of Tlóusài. Would this difference have invalidated my conclusions based on one dialect only? Most probably not – as long as I refrain from stating more than that a certain phoneme here normally corresponds to some other (or the same) phoneme (or even a number of phonemes) there. But as soon as I try to state more than these superficial facts, for instance try to explain why this has come to be so, my guesses may easily go astray and might be contradicted by insights to be gained when starting from another dialect, at least as long as the data hitherto available lack historical depth.

Admittedly, when starting from Tlóusài only, a few times I was tempted to leave the superficial level and to venture some historical guesses, as for instance with respect to the development of the Lushai and Lai (LL) diphthong /ua/ in Maraa. Fortunately, when enlarging my view, nothing came to the fore to disprove me – it could have been different. Made a little bit foolhardy by this success, this time I'll try to be even bolder and not only develop the first outlines of how OM looked like, but also venture some guesses about the differential development. That is, I do not really leave Tlóusài for dealing with some other dialects, but I am trying to add some dynamism to the analysis presented in the first sections. The main intention of these was to facilitate as far as possible comparison between Maraa as documented in R. A. Lorrain's dictionary (with all the flaws it unfortunately contains) and other

languages of this area. The main intention of the following part is to advance our understanding of Maraa itself.

The new approach, however, required yet another differentiation. The different authors used different spelling systems of unequal precision. In order to facilitate comparisons, I had to reduce them to a common standard especially with regard to the vowel system. In the first part I have already introduced this system of my own, and I'll continue to use it. It does not pretend to represent the actual pronunciation, but it tries to allot one or two graphs to each of the finals of Maraa depending on whether they are monophthongs or diphthongs. I order not to deviate too much from the spelling system used until now I deviated from my own principle and did not use the single graph /o/ but the digraph /aw/ for what in the IPA system would have been written /ɔ/. Moreover, I used another digraph /aa/ for [a] in order to distinguish it from [ə], for which I used /a/.

Acceptable as this spelling system might have been for the superficial level, it was bound to soon reveal its limits as soon as I tried to add some historical depth to the analysis including changes in the composition of the vowel system implying changes in the conceptions of what the speakers of these former versions of the language may have regarded as constituting phonemes. In order to arrive at a clearer conception of them, I found it useful to make (a restricted) use of IPA symbols. This led to a triple set of markings: slashes (/.../) for spellings in my own system, square brackets ([...]) for spellings used by the different authors (and today partly also by the people writing their language

themselves) whenever they differ from mine, and vertical lines (|...|) for what I consider phonemes. In order not to overload my paper with these markings, I did not use them whenever I thought it possible to assign the words in question to a certain abstract stage like "old Maraa" (OM) or "common Chin" (CC).

Since the two parts of my paper are meant to be used together, the old numbering of the sections has been retained. This will allow me to refer to previous or following sections without introducing additional specifications.

#### 4. The evidence of Fàbàu [:Fae:bau]

As already mentioned, the analysis presented in the first sections was based on what today in the "Mara Autonomous District" is considered standard Maraa, that is in first instance, but probably not exclusively, the Tlósài dialect. As could already be seen from Parry's material published in 1932, other dialects developed differently. However, the scantiness of the available data basis (often suffering from inconsistencies in the spelling system) did not allow me an analysis similar to that of Tlósài.<sup>1</sup> Still it was sufficient to show that even the words used for the same things were not always the same. From my own experience<sup>2</sup> I knew that further shifts in the standard vocabulary took place even in few decades after the publication of Lorrain's dictionary. There is a great readiness to accept new words. Educated people

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1. It was only after analyzing besides the Tlósài also the Fàbàu data that I could try to make a similar use of those given by Parry for Zàwnài.

2. Though at that time the area had been declared off-limits for foreigners, generous local support allowed me to visit Siaha for a few days and to initiate further cooperation by mail.