Mising Morphophonemics

Tabu TAID
Cotton College, Gauhati, India

In Mising, as in other languages, sounds tend to get modified in different phonetic environments. Mising has a strongly affixative morphological system, and, therefore, such modifications are frequent in this language.

I. When a vowel is followed by a consonant or by a consonant by a vowel, there is no phonetic modification, e.g.,

(a) Vowel followed by a consonant:

/abu/ 'father' + -de (definite article) = /abude/
... + -ko (indefinite article) = /abuko/
... + -ma (negativizer) = /abuma/ etc.

(b) Consonant followed by a vowel:

/takar/ 'star' + -e (nominative suffix) = /takare/
... + -a (vocative suffix) = /takara/
... + -o: ('plenty of' suffix) = /takaro:/ etc.

(N.B. It should, however, be remembered that although syllable-final, and therefore morpheme- and word-final plosives lose the voiced/voiceless opposition, morpheme-final plosives followed by vowels are always voiced, e.g.,

/alap/ or /alab/ 'bird's wing' + -o: = /alabo:/ 'plenty of wings'
/tapat/ or /tapad/ 'leech' + -a = /tapada/ 'O leech!'
/kopak/ or /kopag/ 'banana' + -e = /kopage/ 'banana' (nom)

In this treatment, only /b, d, g/ are used in final positions, in which case the plosives also conform fully to I(b) above.)

II. When a consonant is followed by another consonant, phonetic modification takes place in the following environments:

(a) Modifications by way of regressive assimilation take place extensively in the case of plosives. Taking the final plosives to be /b, d, g/ (see Note under I(b) above), we might proceed to analyze these modifications as follows:
(i) /b/ becomes [p], when followed by voiceless consonants, e.g.

\[ /\text{kab}/ \quad '\text{weep'} + \quad -\text{po} = \quad /\text{kappro}/ \quad '\text{pleasant to weep}' \]
\[ \quad + \quad -\text{ten} = \quad /\text{kapten}/ \quad '\text{weep again}' \]
\[ \quad + \quad -\text{ka} = \quad /\text{kapka}/ \quad '\text{had wept}' \]
\[ \quad + \quad -\text{sed} = \quad /\text{kapsed}/ \quad '\text{added weeping}' \]

/b/ becomes [m], when followed by /m/, e.g.

\[ /\text{kab}/ \quad + \quad -\text{ma} \quad (\text{negativiser}) = \quad /\text{kamma}/. \]

/b/ is partially nasalized, when it is followed by the nasals /n, ŋ, ɲ/, but no modification takes place when it is followed by voiced sounds other than the nasals.

(ii) /d/ becomes [t], when followed by voiceless consonants, e.g.

\[ /\text{ad}/ \quad '\text{write'} + \quad -\text{po} = \quad /\text{atpo}/ \quad '\text{pleasant to write'} \]
\[ \quad + \quad -\text{ten} = \quad /\text{atten}/ \quad '\text{to write again'} \]
\[ \quad + \quad -\text{sed} = \quad /\text{atsed}/ \quad '\text{add to what is written'} \]
\[ \quad + \quad -\text{kin} = \quad /\text{atkin}/ \quad '\text{know how to write'} \]

/d/ becomes [n], when followed by /m, n, ŋ, ɲ/, e.g.

\[ /\text{ad}/ \quad + \quad -\text{ma} = \quad /\text{anma}/ \quad '\text{write not'} \]
\[ /\text{ad}/ \quad + \quad -\text{nam} = \quad /\text{annam}/ \quad '\text{to write'} \]
\[ /\text{ad}/ \quad + \quad -\text{ŋer} = \quad /\text{anŋer}/ \quad '\text{to be fed up with writing'} \]
\[ /\text{ad}/ \quad + \quad -\text{ŋin} = \quad /\text{anŋin}/ \quad '\text{tedious to write (with)}' \]

/d/ becomes [l], when followed by /l/, e.g.

\[ /\text{ad}/ \quad + \quad -\text{len} = \quad /\text{allen}/, '\text{write out'} \]

/d/ becomes [r], when followed by /r/, e.g.

\[ /\text{ad}/ \quad + \quad -\text{re} = \quad /\text{arre}/ \quad '\text{fee for writing'} \]

/d/ becomes [j], when followed by /j/, e.g.

\[ /\text{ad}/ \quad + \quad -\text{jo} \quad (\text{imperative negative}) = \quad /\text{ajjo}/ \quad '\text{don't write'} \]

No modification takes place when /d/ is followed by /b, d, g/ and vowels.
(iii) /g/ becomes [k], when followed by voiceless consonants, e.g.

/dug/ 'run' + -po = /dukpo/ 'pleasant to run'
... + -to = /dukto/ 'run' (imperative)
... + -chin = /dukkin/ 'to know how to run'
... + -sum = /dukusum/ 'gather together by running'

/g/ becomes [ŋ] when followed by /ŋ/, e.g.

/dug/ + -ŋŋ = /duŋŋ/ 'the rest of the race'

No modification takes place when /g/ is followed by voiced sounds except /ŋ/. Partial nasalization of /g/ can, however, be discerned when it is followed by /m, n, ŋ/.

(b) Morpheme-final /ŋ/ undergoes an important modification when it is followed by various consonants except /k, g, ŋ/. In such cases, /ŋ/ is replaced by vowel length, e.g.

/simang/ 'corpse' + -pe = /sima:pe/ 'like a corpse'
... + -be = /sima:be/ 'that corpse to the south'
... + -te = /sima:te/ 'that corpse to the north'
... + -de = /sima:de/ 'the corpse'
... + -ma = /sima:ma/ 'not a corpse'
... + -lo = /sima:lo/ 'on a corpse'
... + -so = /sima:so/ 'on this corpse'
... + -runko = /sima:runko/ 'a corpse for sure'

/duŋ/ 'sit' (root) + -ne = /du:nə/ 'one who sits'
... + -niŋ = /du:niŋ/ 'unpleasant to sit'
... + -zon = /du:zon/ 'sitting companion'
... + -rə = /du:rə/ 'fee for sitting'
... + -jo = /du:jo/ 'don't sit'

/ŋ/ gets deleted when it is followed by /ŋ/, e.g.

/duŋ/ + -ŋŋ = /duŋŋ/ 'begin to sit'

No modification takes place when /ŋ/ is followed by /k, g/, e.g.

/simang/ + -ko = /simanko/ 'a corpse'
/duŋ/ + -gor = /duŋgor/ 'to sit hurriedly' etc.
(c) There are not many instances of progressive assimilation in the language. The following dialectal and idiolectal phenomena may be noted:

(i) /l/ becomes [r], when preceded by /r/, e.g.

/kar/ 'to peel' + -len = karren 'to peel off'
/kor/ 'to take a step' + -lad = korrad 'to take a step back'

(ii) /l/ becomes [n], when preceded by /m/, e.g.

/tam/ 'to spread' + -len = /tamnen/ 'to spread out'
/kum/ 'to salute' + -la = /kumna/ 'having saluted'

However, these instances of progressive modification, particularly (ii), are by no means regular.

III. Some important modifications occur when a morpheme-final or word-final vowel is followed by another vowel. These modifications may be classed under four heads:

A. Insertion of /j/
B. Insertion of /w/
C. Deletion of vowels
D. Gemination of consonants

A. Insertion of /j/

When a morpheme or word ends with the front long vowels /i:/ or /e:/ and takes a vowel suffix¹, /j/ is inserted in place of the vowel length, e.g.

/tanij/: 'man' + -e (nominative and copula) = /tanije/
/kani/: 'opium' + -e " " = /kanije/
/tame/: 'tail' + -e " " = /tameje/
/jame/: 'young man' + -e " " = /jameje/
/tanij: + [-o:] ('plenty of' suffix) = /tanijo:/
/kani: + [-o:] " " " = /kanijo:/
/tame: + [-o:] " " " = /tamejo:/
/jame: + [-o:] " " " = /jamejo:/
/tani: + [-a] (vocative suffix) = /tanija/
/jame: + [-a] " " = /jameja/ etc.

¹ 'Vowel suffix' includes suffixes beginning with vowels.