

ONSET-CONTROLLED VOICING ASSIMILATION IN MISING

Syllable-final laryngeal neutralisation and voicing assimilation are cross-linguistically common phenomena. Mising, an Eastern Tani language of the Tibeto-Burman family spoken by the Mising¹ community in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh in India, is no exception. Mising has 14 consonants and 14 vowels in its phonemic inventory. Vowel length and obstruent voicing are phonemic in the language while aspirated plosives and nasal vowels are absent. Each voiced and voiceless obstruent [p,b,t,d,k,g,s,z] can occur in word-initial, medial and final positions. Though voicing is contrastive in onset and coda position, due to ranking of AGREE and IDOnsLar over IDLar, adjacent heterosyllabic obstruents agree in terms of voicing and consequently, voicing contrast is neutralised in coda. Mising voicing assimilation is onset-controlled because the value of [voice] remains constant in an onset while a coda changes to agree with the onset² - a voiced obstruent in the coda position becomes voiceless when it is followed by a voiceless obstruent in the following syllable onset.

(1) /ib+pan/	[ippan]	‘sleeping away’
/tub+tir/	[tuptir]	‘breaking forcefully’
/tad+pum/	[tatpum]	‘hearing something’
/sud+tum/	[suttum]	‘prohibiting some act’
/dug+pan/	[dukpan]	‘running away’
/ib+sum/	[ipsum]	‘after everyone sleeps’

This paper attempts to investigate laryngeal neutralisation and regressive voicing assimilation in heterosyllabic obstruent clusters in Mising. According to the laryngeal typology presented by Lombardi (1999), Mising can be categorised as a language which shows voicing assimilation in obstruent clusters with word-final voicing contrast along with Yiddish, Romanian and Serbo-Croatian. This fact is relevant for investigating and supporting the claim of Lombardi (1991, 1995) and Cho (1990) that not every language with voicing assimilation in obstruent cluster exhibit syllable-final laryngeal neutralisation.

Mester and Ito (1989) had first proposed that regressive voicing assimilation take into account both the values of a feature [-/+voice], along with a privative [voice] feature and suggested that voicing assimilation was a combination of both neutralization and feature spreading. Hence, spreading of [-voice] can actually be considered to be a result of neutralization. To account for onset-controlled voicing assimilation in Mising, the interaction among three OT constraints - faithfulness, onset-specific faithfulness, and agreement will be discussed in this paper (Lombardi 1996, 1999 and Beckman, 1998): IDENT(voice), IDENT-ONSET(voice) and AGREE(voice). This paper will present a

¹Mising is an autonym and its exonym is Miri.

² Onset consonants can license broader range of contrastive segments and are mostly triggers than targets of phonological processes while coda consonants are affected by processes like place or voice assimilation.

constraint based analysis of the voicing assimilation and positional neutralisation and will argue for the interaction of positional faithfulness and markedness constraints to justify the hypothesis that voicing assimilation is always regressive unless special circumstances are created and the cross-linguistically favoured assimilation is onset-driven.

Keywords: Phonology, Tani language, Mising, onset-coda asymmetry, voicing assimilation, coda-neutralization, constraint ranking, OT

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