The Investigation of Phonological Processes in Mashhadi Dialect

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Abstract

The present study intends to investigate, describe and elucidate the existing phonological processes in Mashhadi dialect through applying a descriptive-analytic approach. Assimilation (adaptation of two consonants or two vowels), dissimilation, elision, addition, metathesis, and alternation are processes which have been assessed in this article. These processes are only discussed at the phonological level and do not make semantic shifts. They are mostly the consequence of people's tendency to have more facility and fluency in using language. The achieved findings indicate that elision and alteration are the most frequent processes which occur in Mashhadi dialect. On the other hand, dissimilation is the least frequent one.

Keywords: phonological process, assimilation, elision, addition, alternation, metathesis

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Introduction

Mashhad is the second largest city in Iran and the center of Razavi Khorasan Province. Khorasan was pronounced Khurasan in Pahlavi language and meant the sun's place or the place where sun rises.

Mashhad, which back in time to more than a thousand years ago, was a major oasis along the ancient Kashaf Rood River. At the end of the 10th century A.H. and the beginning of 11th century A.H., Mashhad was captured by Uzbeks during the rule of Shah Abbas I, and after 10 years Shah Abbas could regain it after a severe struggle. At the beginning of 12th century A.H., Mashhad was also attacked by Afghans until it was conquered again by Nader Shah. Mashhad saw its greatest glory under Nader Shah.

Mashhad is located at 36.20° North latitude and 59.35° East longitude with the total population of almost 2.5 million. It covers an area of 270 km^2 and is in an altitude of 1050m above sea level.

Mashhadi dialect was one of the most important dialects of Fārsī-ye Darī language which was spoken in Tous. It is also so similar to the language of Shahnameh by Ferdowsi. Mashhadi people have a unique dialect with a specific way of pronouncing vocabularies.

The present study aims to investigate and describe the phonological processes existing in Mashhadi dialect. Phonemes may affect each other during the process of making a syllable, word or combining words, so they may change. These phonetic shifts and effects are called phonological processes (Meshkatoddini, 1995), and possible processes which may occur are as follows: assimilation, dissimilation, elision, addition, alternation and metathesis. This study appraised the adverted processes in Mashhadi dialect.

Review of Literature

Due to the fact that Mashhad city is the center of Khorasan province, it is some decades that people's dialect has been affected by standard language of Iran, media, organizations, state offices and universities; therefore, Mashhadi dialect has been gradually changed and has become similar to the Persian standard language. Also, every dialect is consisting of some linguistic varieties which are dependent upon the informants' occupation, education, age and gender. For example, an educated Mashhadi person talks in a different dialect from an uneducated Mashhadi person and also a young Mashhadi man's dialect does not have much in common with an old one. Occupation and gender are other characteristics which affect an informant's dialect and make linguistic varieties.

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On the basis of accomplished researches, Mashhadi dialect is mostly used by uneducated people in friendly and familial occasions. Few researches have been done to assess this issue apropos of Mashhadi dialect. So, the following synopsis has been reported related to the aforementioned topic.

Shabani and Zafaranlou (1999) investigated phonological processes of Gilaki dialect existing in Roudsar province based on a descriptive-analytic approach. They listed the phonological processes as follows: assimilation (adaptation of consonants or assonance), elision (final consonant ellipsis or middle consonant elision), and conversion of consonant cluster [-nn] into [-nd], weakening, inversion, compensatory, conversion of consonant /r/ into consonant /L/, and conversion of vowel /a/ into /o/. According to their study, assimilation, elision and weakening are the most frequent processes in Gilaki dialect (Shabani & Zafaranlou, 1999, p. 37).

Zafaranlou (2002) investigated the phonological processes in four different dialects of Kermani, Zarandi, Bardsiri and Sirjani in Kerman province. The achieved results indicate that weakening process is generally used more than strengthening process. The existing identical processes between these four dialects show their linguistic, historical and geographical affinity (Zafaranlou, 2002, p. 11).

Aghagolzade (2005), in another study, assessed some active phonetic characteristics and phonological processes of Mazandarani dialect applying a descriptive-analytic approach. Active phonetic characteristics refer to phonological processes such as extrinsic germination (resonance), assimilation, weakening or lenition. According to his research, some phonetic shifts are more active in Mazandarani dialect for instance, the usage of /L/ in Mazandarani dialect in proportion to/r/ in Farsi. Among phonological processes, weakening and assimilation were more active than others (Aghagolzade, 2005, p. 4).

In addition to the aforementioned studies, many researchers have described the phonological processes in their theses which will be discussed. It should be pointed out that in these researches, phonological processes beside other characteristics have been investigated as a part of the research, not its whole.

Irani Nezhad (1996) assessed the dialect of Khaf and assembled some data which indicates that phonological processes are classified in three groups of assimilation, dissimilation and syllable structure rules. He described these groups and compared them with phonological processes of standard language (Irani Nezhad, 1996, p. 87).

Kazemi (2000) exemplified Taibadi dialect in his thesis. He examined the processes of assimilation, neutralization of phonological oppositions, syllable structure rules. Syllable

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structure rules are divided into two classes of elision and addition. After describing these processes, he gave some examples of Taibadi dialect to depict its difference with standard language (Kazemi, 2000, p. 63).

Attari (2000) grouped Tabasi dialect adaptation into three categories of 1) assimilation of two consonants, 2) assimilation of two vowels and 3) assimilation of a consonant and a vowel. He also appraised some other processes of dissimilation, neutralization and syllable structure rules. Syllable structure rules were themselves classified into subcategories of elision, addition, conversion and metathesis. Through some examples, he explained how these phonological processes happen in Tabasi dialect (Attari, 2000, p. 109).

As it was adverted, many researches have been accomplished apropos of describing various dialects of Iran such as Birjand, Torbat-e Jam, Ragheh, Ferdows, Gonbad-e Kavoos, Kashmar, Ramsar, Gorgan, etc., but none of them paid much attention to describing Mashhadi dialect; therefore, the present study intends to exemplify phonological processes occurring in Mashhadi dialect.

Data Analysis

Phonological processes indicate a structural shift in phonemic characteristics of a language (Bijan Khan, 2005, p. 185). Phonetic units may happen as a result of co-occurrence, and these shifts are named phonetic processes. Most of phonetic processes are considered as the phonetic universals (Haghshenas, 1977, p. 147).

This article has applied a descriptive-analytic approach to elucidate some characteristics of phonological processes in Mashhadi dialect. Required data have been collected to compare it with standard language through interviewing some uneducated Mashhadi adults or people educated at primary level for two hours. Other resources of getting information were books and poems which were written about Mashhadi dialect. After collecting needed data, they were classified into different groups to determine the phonetic and phonological processes. It should be mentioned that words' phonetic transcription is on the basis of IPA table. To describe the phonological processes of Mashhadi dialect, first, they have been defined and then, they have been compared with the existing phonological processes of Persian standard language.

In this study, just the most significant processes have been investigated which are as follows: assimilation, dissimilation, elision, addition, conversion, and metathesis. Although the adverted processes are only brought up at the phonetic level, they do not make any semantic change. They are just to make more facility and fluency in using language.

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1. Assimilation

One of the most prevalent phonological processes is assimilation. There are also many definitions for it which are mostly similar to each other. For instance, Arlato (2005) states that assimilation is the act of adapting a vowel to another one. It is a kind of alteration in structure of an organ to make a word production possible for us. From the viewpoint of articulatory phonetics, in the assimilation of two consonants, one consonant usually becomes similar to another one's location, place of articulation and voicing (Arlato, 2005, p. 93-94).

By and large, we can define assimilation as adapting two consonants or two vowels.

1.1.   The Assimilation of Two Consonants

Assimilation process usually occurs between two adjacent consonants if two consonants are in common in two or more characteristics.

Vocabulary	Mashhadi dialect	Persian standard language
Cotton	[pamba]	/panbe/
Breeches	[tomun]	/tonban/
Garner	[?ambâr]	/anbâr/
Tail	[domba]	/donbe/
Sunday	[yakŝamba]	/yekŝanbe/

As it is indicated in the above table, the nasal phoneme /n/ is affected by the bilabial consonant /b/; therefore, it has been changed into the consonant /m/.

Another example of assimilation of two consonants is in the below table:

Vocabulary	Mashhadi dialect	Persian standard language
record	[sapt]	/sabt/

In the above example, consonants /b/ and /t/ are adapted, so /b/ is pronounced /p/. In another words, voiced consonant /b/ is affected by /t/ and becomes unvoiced.

Two adjacent consonants may influence each other and naturalize one of them.

Vocabulary	Mashhadi dialect	Persian standard language
Horse	[?asp]	/asb/
Ball	[tub]	/tup/

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Mojtaba[1]	[moštabâ]	/mojtabâ/

In these examples, two consonants /t/ and /ǰ/ have been changed and pronounced /ǰ/ and /š/ to make more facility and fluency. In another words, voiced consonant /ǰ/ is affected by /t/ and has been changed into /š/.

Vocabulary	Mashhadi dialect	Persian standard language
wooden	[?a čub]	/az čub/

In this example, consonant /z/ is allocated to the phoneme /č/ and all of its characteristics have been altered; therefore, adaptation has occurred.

1.2.   Assimilation of Two Vowels

It may happen that the vowel of one syllable be adapted by the vowel of another syllable. This event happens in many Iranian dialects. It also appears in Mashhadi dialect in abundance.

Vocabulary	Mashhadi dialect	Persian standard language
I take it	[moborom]	/mibaram/
I eat it	[moxorom]	/mixoram/
I want it	[moxâbom]	/mixâbam/
I do it	[mokonom]	/mikonam/
Read it	[boxun]	/bexân/
Burn	[bosuz]	/besuz/
He has it	[dere]	/dârad/
He was telling	[mogoft]	/migoft/
He is going	[mere]	/miravad/
Take it	[bigir]	/begir/
He is telling	[mege]	/miguyad/
I am running	[bodovom]	/bedavam/
Spring	[bâhâr]	/bahâr/
Wash it	[bošur]	/bešur/

It should be pointed out that assimilation of two vowels has high frequency in Mashhadi dialect especially in verbs and their inflection and sometimes it just happens to make more fluency, so there is no other justification for that.

2. Dissimilation

Adaptation and dissimilation are in opposition. In dissimilation process, two phonemes are allocated to each other and the former loses those characteristics which are in common with the latter and gains the characteristics of the latter.

Vocabulary	Mashhadi dialect	Persian standard language
when	[vaxte]	/vaqti/

In this example, phoneme /q/ has been altered into its fricative pair /x/.

Vocabulary	Mashhadi dialect	Persian standard language
Mosque	[mačet]	/masjed/

In this example, more complicated processes have been occurred to phonemes /ǰ/ and /s/. First, voiced /ǰ/ has been changed into its unvoiced pair and then, fricative consonant /s/ has been altered into /č/.

Vocabulary	Mashhadi dialect	Persian standard language
horse	[ʔasp]	/asb/

In this word, both phonemes /s/ and /p/ are unvoiced. To make more fluency, /p/ has been transformed into the voiced phoneme /b/. This example has been also mentioned in Mehri Bagheri's "Introduction to Linguistics" as a dissimilation.

Vocabulary	Mashhadi dialect	Persian standard language
May be	[monkena]	/momken ast/

In this example, two phonemes /m/ has appeared near to each other; therefore, the latter bilabial /m/ has been adapted to the alveolar /n/ to show their contrast.

Vocabulary	Mashhadi dialect	Persian standard language
Difficult	[mošgel]	/moškel/

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In this word, two phonemes /š/ and /k/ are both unvoiced, but the latter has been changed into the voiced phoneme /g/ which is an indicative of dissimilation.

3. Elision

Sometimes, a segmental unit such as a consonant, vowel or syllable may be left out to make the word pronounce easier. This process is widely used in Mashhadi dialect and occurs in different ways.

3.1. Final Consonant Elision

In Mashhadi dialect, the final consonant of long or moderate syllables is usually omitted to make it more convenient in pronunciation.

Vocabulary	Mashhadi dialect	Persian standard language
Light bulb	[lâm]	/lâmp/
Bomb	[bom]	/bomb/
Thief	[doz]	/dozd/
Eye	[čaš]	/čašm/
Wool	[paš]	/pašm/
Key	[kili]	/kelid/

In these examples, final consonant /m/ is omitted in two consonantal clusters. In Mashhadi dialect, consonant /t/ does not pronounced after any other consonant and so, ellipsis occurs in these cases.

Vocabulary	Mashhadi dialect	Persian standard language
Fist	[moš]	/mošt/
Thick	[kolof]	/koloft/
Friend	[dus]	/dust/
Yogurt	[mâs]	/mâst/
Skin	[pus]	/pust/

In Mashhadi dialect, glottic consonants /h/ and /? / are mostly skipped in the final syllable of words. This ellipsis usually makes compensatory lengthening in the previous vowel or sometimes does not have any effect.

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Vocabulary	Mashhadi dialect	Persian standard language
Path	[râ:]	/râh/
King	[ša:]	/šah/
Morning	[sob]	/sobh/
Candle	[ša:m]	/šam?/
Moon	[mâ:]	/mâh/

It seems that ellipsis process, occurring in oral language, is a result of economy principle which has not still appeared in writing.

3.2.   Middle Consonant Elision

Vocabulary	Mashhadi dialect	Persian standard language
Bead	[more]	/mohre/
Handkerchief	[desmâl]	/dastmâl/
Waiting	[matal]	/ma?tal/
Cure	[mâleǰe]	/mo? âleǰe/
Needy	[motâǰ]	/mohtâǰ/
Sha?ban[2]	[šabun]	/ša?bân/
Better	[be :tar]	/behtar/
Mahdi[3]	[medi]	/mahdi/
alone	[tana]	/tanhâ/

Data analysis indicates that consonant /t/ is left out at the end of the following consonantal clusters: št – ft – st – xt

Vocabulary	Mashhadi dialect	Persian standard language
He wove	[bǎf]	/bâft/
He closed	[bas]	/bast/
He killed	[koš]	/košt/
He poured	[rix]	/rixt/

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[2] - It is a proper noun, and also a month of the Islamic calendar
[3] - It is a proper noun, and also the name of the prophesized redeemer of Islam who will save the world from injustice and tyranny.

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The above data shows that in Mashhadi dialect, informants are more interested in short syllables rather than long ones. And this tendency can be simply met through ellipsis.

Other samples of elision in Mashhadi dialect are as follows:

Vocabulary	Mashhadi dialect	Persian standard language
I don't want	[nomoxâm]	/nemixâham/
They don't come	[nemiyan]	/nemiâyand/
This	[hamire]	/hamin râ/
I fall it	[mendâzom]	/miandâzam/
Let's go	[berem]	/beravim/
Because	[bereke]	/barâye inke/
You want	[moxây]	/mixâhi/
They come	[biyan]	/biâyand/
Ourselves	[xodmâ]	/xodemân/
He goes	[mere]	/miravad/
Time	[vax]	/vaqt/
Mashhad	[mešad]	/mašhad/
Income	[deslâf]	/dastlâf/
It	[ʔi:]	/in/
For him	[bareš]	/barâyaš/
This much	[hamenqad]	/haminqadr]

As it can be easily understood through the examples, ellipsis process occurs a lot in Mashhadi dialect.

4. Addition

Addition is one of the phonological processes. In speech chain, when two syllables are juxtaposed with each other and these two syllables cannot be easily pronounced, a phonetic unit added as the intermediate phoneme. Some examples in which this process has happened are as follows:

Vocabulary	Mashhadi dialect	Persian standard language
Blankets	[patuâ]	/patu/+/â/ → /patuhâ/
Works	[kârâ]	/kâr/ + /â/ → /kârhâ/

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Hands	[dastâ]	/dast/ + /â/ → /dasthâ/
Berries	[tutâ]	/tut/ + /â/ → /tuthâ/
Meats	[guštâ]	/gušt/ + /â/ → /gušthâ/

In Mashhadi dialect, plural suffix appears as /â/ at the end of the word.

- If the final consonant is unvoiced, no phonetic shift will happen at the time of adding the plural suffix.
- If there is an ellipsis consonant at the end of the word, the plural suffix will make it apparent.

If two vowels collocate with each other, a consonant will emerge between them. This characteristic of Mashhadi dialect is similar to the Persian standard language.

Vocabulary	Mashhadi dialect	Persian standard language
Domestic	[xânagi]	/xâne/ + /i/ → /xânegi/
Madness	[divânegi]	divâne/ + /i/ → /divânegi/

Sometimes, when there are two consonants at the syllable boundary, they will become double.

Vocabulary	Mashhadi dialect	Persian standard language
Dig it	[bekkan]	/bekan/
Jump	[beppar]	/bepar/
Two	[dotta]	/dota/

5. Alternation

Alternation occurs when a segmental unit is altered into another segmental unit and there is no justification for this process in the framework of assimilation, dissimilation or any phonological processes. In Mashhadi dialect, alternation process has a high frequency.

Vocabulary	Mashhadi dialect	Persian standard language
Leaf	[balk]	/barg/
Wall	[difâl]	/divâr/
Salad	[sâlât]	/sâlâd/
Cucumber	[xiyâl]	/xiyâr/
He has	[dere]	/dârad/

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One	[yag]	/yek/

In this dialect, vowel /â/ at the initial syllable is changed into /a/, providing there is no u/o or /â/ at the second syllable.

Vocabulary	Mashhadi dialect	Persian standard language
Maternal aunt	[xâla]	/xâle/
Home	[xana]	/xâne/
Circle	[dayra]	/dayere/
Paternal aunt	[ʔama]	/ame/

Progressive affix /mi/ is pronounced /mo/ or /me/ in Mashhadi dialect.

Vocabulary	Mashhadi dialect	Persian standard language
He is reading	[moxâne]	/mixânad/
He is laughing	[mexande]	/mixandad/
You want it	[moxây]	/mixâhi/
He is going	[mere]	/miravad/

It should be mentioned that sometimes there is no reason for alternation process, for instance there is no basis for the shift from /man/ to /mo/. There are other samples of alternation in Mashhadi dialect which can be seen below.

Vocabulary	Mashhadi dialect	Persian standard language
Take it	[bigir]	/begir/
We went	[raftem]	/raftim/
We ate	[xordem]	/xordim/
Objective preposition	[re]	/râ/
I did	[kerdom]	/kardam/
He has dropped it	[ʔendâxte]	/andâxte ast/
It is possible	[meše]	/mišavad/
He has taken it	[girifta]	/gerefte/

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Ship	[kišti]	/kešti/
For	[bere]	/barâye/
Here	[ʔinǰe]	/inǰâ/
Hole	[selâx]	/surâx/
Pus	[čelk]	/čerk/
Light	[sobok]	32) /sabok/

It can be concluded that if there is a consonant /r/ in the middle or at the end of a word, it will be altered into the lateral consonant /L/. Consonants /L/ and /r/ have all characteristics in common except being lateral, so they may share some phonological processes.

Vocabulary	Mashhadi dialect	Persian standard language
Coconut	[nâlgil]	/nârgil/
Soak	[telit]	/terit/
Pool	[ʔestalx]	/estaxr/

6. Metathesis

In metathesis process, two juxtaposed consonants are inverted. This process is mostly seen between old or unsociable informants and its principal reason is making more fluency and facility in pronunciation. Some examples of this process in Mashhadi dialect are in the below table.

Vocabulary	Mashhadi dialect	Persian standard language
Lock	[qolf]	/qofl/
Picture	[ʔask]	/aks/
Diet	[pahriz]	/parhiz/
Flask	[felâks]	/felâsk/
Match	[kerbit]	/kebrit/

It should be pointed out that in metathesis process may happen in every dialect, so the same words can exist in different dialects. Therefore, these words may not be specific to Mashhadi dialect.

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Conclusion

Due to the fact that there are various processes and environmental circumstances in producing a dialect, different types of dialects can be seen in a country. These dialects may differ in phonetic or phonological level. Based on the achieved data, Mashhadi dialect is different from Persian standard language at phonological level.

Mashhadi dialect consists of some linguistic varieties which are dependent upon the informants' occupation, education, age and gender. Owing to the fact that Mashhad city is the center of Khorasan province, its people's dialect has been affected by Persian standard language and media; therefore, Mashhadi dialect has been gradually changed and lost its characteristics and it is only used by uneducated people in friendly and familial communities. Needed data have been achieved through interviewing some uneducated Mashhadi adults and written resources. Based on the collected data, phonological processes have been classified into the following subcategories: assimilation (adaptation of two consonants or two vowels), dissimilation, elision (final consonant ellipsis or middle consonant ellipsis), addition, alternation, and metathesis.

Considering the assembled data in this research, it can be concluded that assimilation, elision and alternation processes have higher frequency in Mashhadi dialect, and dissimilation has the lowest frequency in this dialect.

This dialect possesses various phonological and phonetic processes and there is no time to evaluate all of them in this article and just some restricted samples have been adverted. Further aspects of Mashhadi dialect can be examined in other researches.

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Appendix

Some examples of phonological processes in Mashhadi dialect

Phonological process	Vocabulary	Mashhadi dialect	Persian standard language
Alternation, assimilation	A lot	[xeyle]	/xeyli/
Elision	How much	[čeqad]	/čeqadr/
Elision, alternation	Short	[kotâ]	/kutâh/
Assimilation two vowels	It remained	[momund	/mimând/
Alternation, elision	From that	[?azu]	/az ân/
Elision, alternation	Cookie	[kolča]	/koluče/
Alternation	Laugh	[xende]	/xande/
Alternation	On	[var]	/bar/
Alternation	Cry	[girya]	/gerye/
Elision, alternation	Because	[bereke]	/barâye inke/
Elision, alternation	Over there	[?usar	/ânsar/
Elision	These	[?inâr]	/in hâ râ/
Elision, alternation	Me	[more]	/man râ/
Alternation	Sheep	[gosband]	/gusfand/
Elision	Seven	[haf]	/haft/
Alternation	He wrote	[nivišt]	/nevešt/
Elision	Brother	[berâr]	/barâdar/
Elision, alternation	In this way	[?ijura]	Injurie
Elision, alternation	Handkerchief	[desmâl	/dastmâl/
Assimilation of two consonants	Cotton	[pamba]	/panbe
Elision, alternation	Back	[puštâ]	/pošthâ/
Alternation	It was broken	[lombid]	/rombid/
Assimilation of two vowels	Comb	[ŝₐna]	/šâne/
Elision	joints	[bandâ]	/bandhâ/
Assimilation of two vowels	Heel	[pâšna]	/pâšne/
Alternation	One	[yag]	/yek/
Elision	They entrusted	[mespordan]	/misepordand/
Alternation	Number	[šemara]	šomâre

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Assimilation of two vowels	Gateway	[dervâza]	/darvâze
Assimilation of two vowels	Slave	[qolum]	/qolâm/
Assimilation of two vowels	Again	[dobâra]	/dobâre/
Alternation	Shoes	[kabš]	/kafš/
Elision, alternation	You don't know	[nemdeni]	/nemidâni/
Alternation	People	[merdom]	/mârdom/
Alternation	Body	[bedan]	/badan/
Elision, alternation	Himself	[xodšâ]	/xodaš ra/
Alternation	Open	[vâ]	/bâz/
Assimilation of two vowels	He doesn't have	[nedere]	/nadârad/
Addition	Hoof	[somb]	/som/
Assimilation of two vowels	Shop	[dokun]	/dokân/
Assimilation of two vowels	He was doing	[mekerd]	/mikard/
Addition	Stain	[lokka]	Loke
Assimilation of two vowels	He was pouring	[merext]	/mirixt/
Alternation	Hole	[selâx]	/surâx/
Elision, alternation	We were falling down	[moftâdem]	/mioftâdim/
Addition	Tail	[domb]	/dom/
Alternation	Stand up	[vaxez]	/barxiz/
Alternation, elision	Other	[dega]	/digar/
Assimilation of two vowels	pillar	[pâya]	/pâye/

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