

Current change in the loanword tonology of North Kyungsang Korean

Young Hwang
(Jeonju University)

The loanword tonology of North Kyungsang (NK) Korean is mora-sensitive and high tone is generally assigned to heavy syllables in English loanwords. However, recent studies, such as Kim (2018), report that vowel length is no longer distinctive among younger speakers. This indicates that bimoraicity is being lost from syllables that had a long vowel, and this moraic change may further influence their tone patterns.

To examine if the loss of long vowels in the production of younger NK speakers has any impact on their tone assignment patterns of English loanwords, a production study was conducted with two different age groups of NK speakers (older speakers in their 60s and younger speakers in their 20s). 3,384 English loanwords were collected and produced by the speakers of two age groups, and then the tone patterns were annotated by the author of this study.

The results of this study show that the moraic characteristics of English loanwords in NK Korean are being weakened, and intergenerational tone changes are happening especially from English loanwords that were assigned double high accent with a heavy initial syllable. The results indicate that bimoraicity is being weakened not only from syllables with a long vowel but also from those with a coda consonant. According to Hayes (1989), a vowel length distinction is an important feature of moraic languages, and it is very rare that a language has a moraic distinction only with coda consonants. Based on this typological background, we can assume that the loss of the vowel length distinction may undermine the moraic character of NK Korean generally.

The results of this study also showed that polysyllabic English loanwords are affected by the tone change before shorter words. Double high accent is being lost first from longer words, and this shows that the bimoraicity in the initial syllable is being lost in longer words before shorter words. For English loanwords that have changed the tone patterns in the production of younger speakers, the newly assigned tone patterns follow the general tone assignment rules observed from words that have a light initial syllable and are largely predictable.

References

- Hayes, B. (1989). Compensatory lengthening in moraic phonology. *Linguistic Inquiry*, 20, 253-305.
- Kim, H.-J. (2018). Diachronic change in vowel length contrast in North Kyungsang Korean. *Studies in Phonetics, Phonology and Morphology*, 24(3), 273-295.