



Research Article

Acoustic evidence for diachronic sound change in Korean prosody: A comparative study of the Seoul and South Kyungsang dialects



Hyunjung Lee*, Allard Jongman

Department of Linguistics, University of Kansas, USA

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ABSTRACT

This paper examined the acoustic properties of the pitch accent of South Kyungsang Korean, focusing on generational differences. Kyungsang Korean has lexical pitch accents, whereas standard Seoul Korean does not. However, whether the pitch accents are maintained by younger Kyungsang speakers is questionable given the influence of Seoul Korean. Through comparisons between older and younger speakers and between Seoul and South Kyungsang speakers, this study tested if and how sound change occurs in the pitch accent system of the regional dialect, and if the prosody of Kyungsang Korean shifts towards that of non-tonal Seoul Korean. We examined F_0 scaling and alignment of pitch accents for the data collected from 40 female Korean speakers (10 younger and 10 older speakers each for Seoul and South Kyungsang dialects). Clear acoustic differences between generations provided evidence for diachronic sound change in the lexical pitch accent of South Kyungsang Korean. First, the differences in F_0 scaling and alignment across accent contrasts are less distinct for younger Kyungsang speakers than for older speakers. Second, the F_0 peak occurs later for younger Kyungsang speakers across all accent classes, resulting in a final rising accent pattern in disyllables similar to Seoul Korean. Third, despite the similarity with Seoul Korean, results from longer words revealed that Kyungsang Korean is still distinct from Seoul in terms of its maintenance of the lexical pitch accent. Based on these findings, we conclude that the sound change in lexical pitch accent is in progress by satisfying the prosodic properties of both Seoul and South Kyungsang Korean.

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1. Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate diachronic sound change in the prosody of South Kyungsang Korean, and to address how this dialect's prosodic properties shift toward those of standard Seoul Korean. The South and North Kyungsang dialects of Korean (spoken by approximately 13 million people in the southeastern part of Korea) have preserved lexical pitch accents from Middle Korean (15–16th centuries), whereas the standard Seoul dialect lost its lexical pitch accent around the 17th century (e.g., Ramsey, 1975; Lee & Ramsey, 2000; Kenstowicz, Cho, & Kim, 2008). In a pitch accent language, the location of pitch prominence in a word cues meaning differences. In disyllables, for example, Kyungsang dialects distinguish triplets using three contrastive pitch accent patterns as in *kácì* (HL) 'type', *kácí* (HH) 'branch', and *kàcì* (LH) 'eggplant', whereas these triplets are homonyms for Seoul Korean speakers who do not use pitch differences for lexical distinctions. However, whether these lexical pitch accent contrasts in Kyungsang Korean are maintained by younger speakers consistent with older generations is questionable due to an increase in contact with Seoul speakers (Lee, 2008) and the prevailing linguistic ideology that has lent Seoul Korean a strong normative bias (Silva, 2011).

Over the past several decades, Kyungsang speakers have had more exposure to the standard Seoul dialect through increased contact with Seoul speakers and media based in Seoul (Lee, 2008). According to the notion that "dialect differences are the result of isolation and the lack of communication" (Labov, 1974: 234), exposure to a different dialect may be an important factor in dialect change. In fact, several empirical studies have demonstrated that long-term exposure to a target dialect results in the acquisition of speech characteristics of that dialect (e.g., Munro, Derwing, & Flege, 1999; Evans & Iverson, 2007) in both production and

* Corresponding author. Current address: Department of English, Hankyong National University, 327 Jung-ang-ro, Ansong-si, Kyenggi-do 456-749, Republic of Korea. Tel.: +82 10 3325 5203.

E-mail address: hyunjunglee123@gmail.com (H. Lee).

perception. Importantly, the dialect acquisition observed in previous synchronic studies may be evidence to support diachronic sound change induced by language exposure or language contact. In their view of language change, [Trudgill \(1986\)](#) and [Auer and Hinskens \(1996\)](#) claimed that the face-to-face communication between speakers forms a short-term accommodation, and if the permanently occurring short-term accommodation becomes a long-term accommodation, this might affect the language community, leading to language change. In this sense, we can reasonably ask whether a diachronic change occurs in Kyungsang Korean because the regional variety has been increasingly in contact with the standard Seoul dialect over decades, which leads us to doubt the extent of linguistic homogeneity across older and younger generations.

Along with the exposure to Seoul Korean, the language ideology in Korean motivates us to question the homogeneity of Kyungsang Korean between older and younger speakers. In sociolinguistics, the prestige or stigma of language is considered an important social factor in language change (e.g., [Heffernan, Borden, Erath, & Yang, 2010](#); [Armstrong, 2012](#)). By defining ‘standard Korean’ as “the modern speech of Seoul widely used by the well-cultivated” (1977, National Institute of the Korean Language), the Korean government’s language policy has given Seoul Korean a strong normative bias ([Silva, 2011](#)). A survey by [Min \(1997\)](#) also noted that college students who speak regional dialects have a negative attitude toward their dialects, which is particularly true among females. This leads to the hypothesis that the Korean ideology might motivate younger Kyungsang speakers to imitate speech characteristics of prestigious Seoul Korean or to avoid marked properties in their Kyungsang speech. Accordingly, in addition to the exposure to Seoul Korean, the prevailing Korean ideology might play another critical role in increasing the phonetic and phonological similarity between Seoul and Kyungsang Korean in favor of Seoul Korean. In this sense, the increased exposure to Seoul Korean might provide an optimal linguistic setting for younger Kyungsang speakers who favorably imitate the phonetic properties of the standard Seoul dialect.

For example, [Lee \(2008\)](#) found generational differences for sentence intonation in North Kyungsang Korean. [Lee \(2008\)](#) showed that older Kyungsang speakers use falling intonation in marking yes/no and WH questions as well as statements, and pointed out the non-universal tendency of falling intonation for yes/no questions in Kyungsang Korean. [Lee \(2008\)](#) attributed the weak intonation distinctions in Kyungsang to sentence-final particles to mark sentence types, although this was not empirically supported in her data. In [Lee \(2008\)](#), contrary to the older generation, younger Kyungsang speakers did not preserve the final-falling intonation for yes/no questions and WH questions. Instead, the younger generation used final-rising intonation for both question types, similar to Seoul Korean. [Lee \(2008\)](#) suggested that this generational difference possibly indicates ongoing sound change that may be attributed to increased exposure to prestigious Seoul Korean.

Although the current sociolinguistic setting of Kyungsang Korean suggests a possibility of diachronic sound change, few studies have explored this topic. Therefore, the present study investigated sound change in Kyungsang Korean by focusing on lexical pitch accent. We tested the phonetic homogeneity of contrastive accents between older and younger speakers of South Kyungsang in an apparent-time investigation where the phonetics between two different age groups were observed at the same point in time. Apparent-time studies assume that the speech of each generation reflects the language that existed at the time when that generation learned the language ([Bailey, Wikle, Tillery, & Sand, 1991](#)). In addition to the generational comparison, we compared the prosodic properties of South Kyungsang with those of Seoul Korean to address whether and how the prosody of Kyungsang is re-formed to approximate standard Seoul Korean, which is not a pitch accent language. As a first sociophonetic study of Kyungsang Korean, the phonetic examination in this study will hopefully build a bridge between past research and future work that traces the process of diachronic sound change in South Kyungsang Korean.

1.1. Prosody of Seoul Korean

In her investigation of the phonetics and phonology of Seoul Korean prosody [Jun \(1993, 1998\)](#) suggested that surface phonetic forms of an utterance can be used to define prosodic units at different levels, and proposed a prosodic hierarchy of Seoul Korean based on phonetic patterns. [Jun \(1993, 1998\)](#) proposed the accentual phrase (AP) as the smallest unit, which establishes a tonal boundary in Seoul Korean. [Jun \(1993, 1998, 2000, 2006\)](#) indicated that most APs have a phrase-final rising pattern (LH) in Seoul Korean, and therefore the most common AP-final tone is a High tone; but, [Jun \(2000, 2006\)](#) also stated that when the following AP begins with a High tone, an AP-final tone is sometimes realized as a Low tone. According to Jun, the underlying tonal pattern of the AP in Seoul Korean is LHLH or HHLH, and the realization of either LHLH or HHLH depends on the laryngeal gesture of the phrase-initial segment; when the initial segment has [+stiff vocal cords] with aspirated or tense obstruents, the phrase-initial tone is High, otherwise it is Low. [Jun \(1998\)](#) states that all four tones in LHLH (or HHLH) are realized when an AP has four or more syllables; in her later study, [Jun \(2000\)](#) showed intonational variations in which the first tone is realized on the first syllable of the AP, but the second tone (i.e., H) is loosely associated with the second syllable or grouped together with the preceding tone or the following tone. When there are fewer than four syllables, the tone in the second or third syllables is undershot. For example, an AP with three syllables has either LLH (or HLH) or LHH (or HHH) depending on which syllable is undershot. Overall, it is noted that with the exception of [+stiff vocal cords] phrase-initial segments, the AP in Seoul Korean most commonly has a final rising tonal pattern (i.e., LH).

1.2. Lexical pitch accent in South Kyungsang Korean

The accent contrasts between the South and North Kyungsang dialects are alike in that the two dialects have monosyllabic High (H) and disyllabic HH, HL and LH accents. However, due to different historical development, while South Kyungsang has preserved the rising accent (R) from Middle Korean, in North Kyungsang the rising accent has merged with H(H) and the vowels in the accent

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