

Prosodic strengthening and lexical pitch accent in South Kyungsang Korean and implications for Seoul Korean

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Studies on prosodic strengthening in the phonetics-prosody interface literature have increasingly illuminated that production of phonological segments or features is phonetically implemented in a way to heighten (or strengthen) their phonetic clarity when they occur in prosodically strong locations such as edges of prosodic domains (especially in domain-initial positions) and in syllables under prominence (e.g., stressed or pitch accented syllables). One of the premises underlying the theory is that prosodic strengthening is not simply a low-level phonetic phenomenon but it serves as a phonetic hallmark of a higher-order linguistic (prosodic) structure, often making reference to linguistic (phonological) contrast. Studies thus far, however, focused mainly on the prosodic strengthening on segmental features, leaving important questions unanswered that concern how suprasegmental tonal features are phonetically shaped in strengthening environments that interact with a higher-order prosodic structure. In this talk, I discuss this issue by examining prosodic strengthening effects in South Kyungsang (SK) Korean.

Unlike Standard Seoul Korean in which the tonal realization is stipulated by phrase-level intonational phonology, SK Korean employs a lexical pitch accent system, so that whether a vowel is associated with a High or a Low tone is lexically determined although the Low tone may be seen as a default phrase-initial property. We have recently begun to explore how phonetic realization of vowels with different pitch accent types (High vs. Low) is modulated by prosodic strengthening in terms of tonal as well as segmental realization. Some of the specific questions to be addressed in this talk are to what extent prosodic strengthening influences tonal contrast between H vs. L in SK Korean; how the prosodically-conditioned tonal realization may be interpreted in terms of enhancement of phonological (lexical) contrast, and how the enhancement pattern compares that of Seoul Korean. Moreover, I will also present some acoustic data which will illuminate how the intrinsic vowel height difference between high vs. low vowels may further interact with the pitch accent type and prosodic strengthening as may be reflected in pitch and voice quality (or degree of vowel glottalization). Given that biomechanical constraints caused by the vowel height difference are likely to influence tension of vocal folds which is likely to influence F0 realization at least at the low level, it will be discussed whether such a seemingly low-level effect may (or may not) be under speaker control, interacting with linguistic contrast and prosodic strengthening.

The results will then be discussed more broadly in terms of the phonetics-prosody interface, its relationship to linguistic enhancement, and implications for the on-going sound change in Seoul Korean.