

The course of intergenerational suffixal accent change in English loanwords of North Kyungsang Korean

North Kyungsang (NK) Korean is a pitch accent language which uses (H)igh and (L)ow tones to distinguish words (Jun et al. 2006). In the NK native vocabulary, the accented high tone is assigned lexically and its position in the word is generally unpredictable. However, unlike native words, the assignment of accent to English loanwords is sensitive to moraic structure and largely predictable in terms of syllable weight (Kenstowicz & Sohn 2001; M. Kim 1997; J. Kim 2009; Davis 2010, among others).

The difference between NK native words and English loanwords is further seen in the pattern of accentuation when a suffix is added. Since NK Korean allows only one accented syllable in a single prosodic word [stem+suffix], if an accented stem is combined with an accented suffix, one of the accents must be deleted. In NK native words, when a word with an accent on the final syllable is combined with an accented suffix, the stem loses its accent and the accent appears on the suffix (e.g. *palám* (LH) ‘wind’ + *-chélem* (HL) ‘like’ --> *palam-chélem* (LL-HL)). However, according to Kenstowicz & Sohn (2001), NK English loanwords have a distinct tone pattern from NK native words showing that they always keep their stem accent (e.g. *leymón* (LH) ‘lemon’ + *-chélem* (HL) ‘like’ --> *leymón-chelem* (LH-LL)).

Yet, this traditional observation described by Kenstowicz & Sohn (among others) is based on NK Korean as spoken in the 1990s and earlier, by now an older generation of speakers. Our recent observation reveals that this unique loanword pattern seems to be changing especially among a younger generation and that this variation (i.e. change in progress) has not been previously reported. To check the reality of the tonal change, a production experiment was conducted with 11 younger (born after 1985) and 10 older (born before 1965) speakers of NK Korean who have lived their lives in the NK region. The stimuli consist of one-, two-, and three-syllable final accented loanwords that end with either a CV or CVC syllable to investigate how syllable number and weight affect the tonal change.

The overall results reveal that a pitch-pattern diffusion is in progress across the board in final accented NK English loanwords when they are combined with an accented suffix. Such loanwords seem to be losing their unique tone pattern (stem accent) and are becoming more like native words, which have a suffixal accent. Although the diffusion is happening for both younger and older speakers, the degree of diffusion is different and is quite patterned, based on syllable structure and word length. For the younger speakers, most of the bisyllabic and trisyllabic loanwords have already changed to the native pattern whereas the diffusion is only beginning for monosyllabic loanwords, most of which keep their stem accent under suffixation (e.g. *khép-chelem* (HLL) ‘like a cup’ as in Figure 1). However, the older speakers mostly retain the traditional pattern (stem accent) as described by Kenstowicz & Sohn except for one structurally defined group of words: trisyllabic words that end with an accented light syllable (see Figure 1). Here, we infer that the pitch-pattern diffusion witnessed by the younger generation began with trisyllabic words ending in final light syllables since this change also occurs with the older generation.

Given the observations above regarding the similarities and differences between the two generations, we can plot the course for how the native-like pitch pattern diffusion is occurring on loanwords in NK Korean. For example, the diffusion begins with trisyllabic loanwords that end with a final light syllable, since all speakers in our current study show this pattern. Also, monosyllabic words produced by the younger speakers show that those consisting of a heavy syllable are most conservative in keeping the traditional loanword pattern of stem accent. Taken altogether, the results reflect that the change begins from trisyllabic loanwords with a final light syllable and ends with monosyllabic loanwords consisting of a final heavy syllable. That is, polysyllabic words are more affected by the diffusion, and within them, words that end with a light syllable change first.

Although in our study there was surprisingly little individual variation, we found one younger speaker whose pitch-pattern was nativized for all word categories. In his production, the

diffusion was mostly done even for monosyllabic words that end with a heavy syllable. We also found some younger speakers who kept the traditional stem accent only in highly frequent bisyllabic loanwords ending in a heavy syllable (i.e. *kheychap-chelem* (LHLL) ‘like ketchup’). The data presented here shows evidence for individual variation within this change, but in a predictable way. All in all, the results show that a pitch-pattern diffusion is in progress in NK English loanwords and it is a patterned diffusion. This supports Labov’s (2012:290) contention of the “breathtaking uniformities” found in cases of in-progress community language change.

Figure 1: Representative sample of pitch pattern diffusion on final accented NK English loanwords with the accented suffix ‘chelem’ (O = older, Y = younger, F = female, M = male)

Word type			Monosyllabic words		Bisyllabic words		Trisyllabic words	
Pronunciation			<i>khep-chelem</i>	<i>kha-chelem</i>	<i>kheychap-chelem</i>	<i>sukhi-chelem</i>	<i>chokholeyt-chelem</i>	<i>panana-chelem</i>
English words			‘cup’	‘car’	‘ketchup’	‘ski’	‘chocolate’	‘banana’
NK suffix (accented)			‘chelem’	‘chelem’	‘chelem’	‘chelem’	‘chelem’	‘chelem’
Expected loanword accent pattern (stem accent)			HLL	HLL	LHLL	LHLL	LLHLL	LLHLL
Participants		Year born	Final CVC	Final CV	Final CVC	Final CV	Final CVC	Final CV
Older group	OF1	1960	HLL	HLL	LHLL	LHLL	LLHLL	LLLHL
	OF2	1964	HLL	HLL	LHLL	LHLL	LLHLL	LLLHL
	OF3	1965	HLL	LHL	LHLL	LHLL	LLHLL	LLLHL
	OM1	1960	HLL	HLL	LHLL	LHLL	LLHLL	LLLHL
	OM2	1962	HLL	HLL	LHLL	LHLL	LLHLL	LLLHL
	OM3	1960	HLL	HLL	LHLL	LHLL	LLHLL	LLLHL
Younger group	YF1	1988	HLL	LHL	LLHL	LHLL	LLLHL	LLLHL
	YF2	1990	HLL	HLL	LLHL	LLHL	LLLHL	LLLHL
	YF3	1995	HLL	LHL	LLHL	LLHL	LLLHL	LLLHL
	YM1	1991	HLL	HLL	LLHL	LLHL	LLLHL	LLLHL
	YM2	1996	HLL	HLL	LLHL	LLHL	LLLHL	LLLHL
	YM3	1993	LHL	LHL	LHLL	LLHL	LLLHL	LLLHL

(Note: Shading indicates the changing pattern; no shading indicates the conservative pattern of loanword stem accent)

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