

The Base in Korean Noun Paradigms: Evidence from Tone

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This study utilizes evidence from the analysis of a tonal alternation to address the choice of the base in Korean noun inflection. It is well known that the isolation (citation) form is the site of a neutralization among coronal codas (1). The stem's underlying representation would naturally be sought in an inflected form, such as the accusative *-il*. Nevertheless, various researchers (Kang 2003, Jun 2010, Ito 2010) observe that for many speakers the etymologically expected coronal (reflected in the orthography) is being replaced, primarily by [-s], so that former /nac/ 'day' now inflects as [nat, nas-i, nas-il]. They also point out that [-s] has the highest type frequency among the {-t, -t^h, -s, -c, -c^h} stems. Albright (2008) argues that if the citation form in [-t] is the base, then choosing [-s] for the inflected stem form offers the greatest chance of a "correct" hit among the five possible coronal alternants. He uses these data to support a theory of paradigm acquisition in which the learner proceeds probabilistically and selects a single cell as the base for *all* alternations.

We investigate how tonal alternations bear on the role of the citation form in Korean noun paradigms. In the Pusan dialect monosyllabic nouns with a high tone present two contrasting tone patterns (2): the suffix may assimilate the stem's high or it may fail to do so and appear as low (unmarked). The type frequency of the H-H pattern is about twice that of H-L. To investigate the role of the citation form, we polled 12 Pusan speakers for the tonal patterns assigned to 16 monosyllabic coronal coda stems that reconstruct to H-L in Middle Korean: the conservative form with {-t, -t^h, -c, -ch} motivated by the orthography and the innovating pronunciation with [-s] (3). If the [-s] pronunciation indicates that speakers take the citation form as the base (Jun 2010), and if this paradigm cell is the base for all alternations (Albright 2008), then we predict that speakers will reason probabilistically about tone as well and will tend to choose the H-H pattern rather than H-L, since it offers the greater chance of a "correct" hit. In general, our data support these predictions. When our speakers inflected the word with [-s], the H-H pattern was substituted for H-L at a rate of 68% compared to only 15% with the original coronal. Also there was a good correlation ($r = .76$) between the log-transformed token frequency of the word and its resistance to this tonal substitution. Less frequent items were less likely to resist the change to the H-H pattern, presumably because the speaker has less evidence and hence less confidence as to their tonal pattern.

(1)	nat	pat	nat	nat	(2)	tál	p ^h ál	(3)	pát	pát	citation
	nas-i	pac ^h -i	nac-i	nac ^h -i		tár-î	p ^h ár-i		pác ^h -i	pás-î	nominative
	nas-il	pat ^h -il	nac-il	nac ^h -il		tár-íl	p ^h ár-il		pát ^h -il	pás-il	accusative
	'sickle'	'field'	'day'	'face'		'moon'	'arm'		'field'	'field'	

(word count = 491)

References

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