

Contact-induced changes in Korean: Production of stops by heritage Korean speakers

Production of stops by heritage Korean speakers in an English dominant setting draws particular attention due to the discrepancy between Korean and English. Korean has a typologically unusual three-way laryngeal contrast of voiceless stops, among aspirated stops /p^h, t^h, k^h/, lenis stops /p, t, k/ and fortis stops /p', t', k'/; while English has two-way laryngeal contrast between voiced unaspirated stops /b, d, g/ and voiceless aspirated stops /p, t, k/. Besides, Korean lacks release burst of word-final stops unlike English voiceless stops.

The language system and knowledge of grammar of heritage speakers is somewhat different from that of either native speakers or second language learners due to their unique language acquisition experience and language use experience. Previous literature generally concluded that the grammatical systems of heritage speakers undergo one or more processes such as incomplete acquisition, language attrition, or transfer effects from the dominant language, depending on the observed phenomena (e.g. Montrul, 2002; Jarvis & Odlin, 2000).

The questions we ask here is whether, given long-term and regular exposure to two languages, the cross-linguistic influence occurs in heritage speakers in the domain of the sound system of Korean stops and whether sociolinguistic background plays a role. By addressing such questions, we aim to obtain a greater understanding of how heritage grammar is formed the way it is, particularly with relation to the unique language acquisition and use experience of speakers.

We explore the hypothesis that heritage Korean speakers differ from native Korean speakers in their production of stops showing transfer effect from English. The underlying assumption is that the effects of sustained exposure to English lead to cross-linguistic influence from English, the dominant language, to Korean, the minority language.

We also hypothesize that sociolinguistic backgrounds of heritage speakers influence their sound systems. The heritage speakers would have different language experience depending on when and how they acquired their heritage languages. They differ in age of first exposure to English, which could be simultaneously introduced with Korean, or after the foundations of Korean are in place. They also differ in their communities, which could be a largely Korean community where they have stable and ample Korean input in various contexts, or more diverse communities where they have limited Korean input. Each of them has unique language acquisition and language use experience which may result in different linguistic systems.

Previous studies showed that the three-way contrast is signaled by not solely Voice Onset Time (VOT) but a combination of several prosodic parameters such as pitch (e.g. Kang, 2014). In this study, we analyze VOT of word-initial stops and F0 of the following vowel. We also investigate if word-final stops are released as English voiceless stops are.

A total of 50 speakers, 10 native Korean speakers and 40 heritage Korean speakers in their 20s, participated in this study. They filled out a detailed sociolinguistic background survey and asked to name the various objects drawn on the cards in carrier phrases.

This is still an on-going study. We are currently undergoing data analysis. Statistical analysis will be followed. The study will be completed by the time of presentation.

References

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