

## **The intervening consonant as the variable factor in Korean umlaut**

The intervening consonants that often block occurrence of umlaut in Korean have previously been analyzed by grouping them under the feature [+coronal] (Hume 1990; Kim 1999). This categorical approach however is in conflict with the facts of umlaut data in Korean dialects. As has been reported repeatedly in the literature, only alveopalatal consonants act as a barrier to the following high front vowel assimilating the preceding back vowel in some dialects, while in others the process occurs relatively robustly when the intervening consonant is /r/. These reports, however, offer a very narrow view of the process as they are done in a survey of one subdialect, often with one informant, without due attention paid to many social variables that influence occurrence of umlaut in Korean.

In order to keep such variable factors from weighing in as little as possible, this paper will analyze umlaut data gathered from *Hankwuk Pangen Calyocip*, the eight volume dictionary of Korean dialects published in 1987 by the Academy of Korean Studies, to see how each intervening consonant that belongs to the [+coronal] group, i.e. t, t<sup>h</sup>, s, n, r, ʃ, ʃ<sup>h</sup>, fares as the barrier to umlaut in the eight regional dialects traditionally recognized along the provincial borders. I expect that as is usual in processes of this type there will be much heterogeneity across dialects in the tabulated result but it would be an orderly heterogeneity (Labov 1994; Weinreich et al. 1968), showing variability of application not just between coronal vs. noncoronal consonants but between the coronal consonants themselves, presumably alveopalatals forming a separate subgroup that block umlaut most robustly in Korean. The result is then combined with a similar analysis previously done with regard to the target vowel variable (Kim 2003) to gain a deeper understanding of umlaut in Korean as a case of lexical and phonological diffusion (Wang 1969; Chen 1977; Kiparsky 1995).

## References

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