SYLLABLES AND CONSONANTS

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ABSTRACT

Syllables are projections of vowels. The first projection licenses a consonant position (coda) which is optional. The second projection licenses a consonant position (onset) which is obligatory. Consonantal phenomena such as assimilation and deletion are the consequence of 'fitting' consonants into syllable structure positions licensed by vowel projections.

In Korean there is widespread deletion of consonants at morpheme boundaries where two consonants compete for a single syllable structure position. For example, consider the alternation of [s] and ㅁ in [kap] 'price', [kapse] (foc), and [kapsi] (sub). The focus ending is [s], the subject ending is [m], and the basic noun is /kaps/. The tense final consonants (/p/ and /s/) compete for a single coda position word finally or before an onset consonant, then /s/ invariably deletes. Where a vowel follows the consonant cluster, both are retained. Similarly, there is an alternation between [m] and ㅁ in [samki] 'to steam', [salmini] 'as one steams'. Here in lexical /salm/, /l/ and /m/ compete for a single coda position before an onset consonant and /l/ deletes. Again, where the cluster is followed by a vowel both consonants are retained. In the case of /kaps/ it is the second consonant of the cluster that deletes, in the case of /salm/ it is the first. Both the fact that a consonant deletes in the particular context, and the particular consonant that deletes in a given cluster follow from syllable structure principles.

Let us assume an account of syllable structure where syllables are projections of vowels; that is, a vowel is the head of a syllable. The first vowel projection (V' or rhyme) can optionally license a consonant position (coda). The second vowel projection (V' or syllable) obligatorily licenses a consonant position (onset). Onset positions, which are obligatory, are filled first. Furthermore, a syllable has a single sonority peak. In this framework, the consonant cluster reduction phenomena in Korean follows from the fact that the onset and coda positions can be filled by no more than one consonant each. The consonant that wins the position where two compete for it is the consonant with the lowest sonority value. If we assume that the syllable structure principles outlined above are universal, then all that a Korean child must learn is that the consonant positions licensed by syllable structure in Korean are limited to single consonants. Which consonants delete, and under what circumstances, will follow from universal principles of syllabification and general considerations of sonority. The evidence that the child will need to arrive at the language particular property of Korean that only a single consonant can fill a syllable structure position is readily available from the fact that words end in no more than one consonant. The fact that it is the lowest sonority member of the pair is the unmarked case if syllables tend to maximize the single sonority curve. In this way a fairly restricted, but general theory of syllable structure and sonority, not only gives an account of cluster reduction in Korean, but suggests a way that the learnability question (how complex grammatical facts can be mastered so rapidly with the limited data available to the child) can be addressed in phonology.

There is one additional aspect of Korean consonant cluster reduction that I will consider here. The combination of /ilk+ti/ gives [ilkta] 'to read' as expected. That is where /l/ and /k/ compete for the single coda position of the first syllable, the lower sonority /k/ wins. However, the combination of /ilk+ki/ gives [ilkki]. Here it appears that /l/ has won the coda position and /k/ has been deleted in violation of the sonority principle. It seems that when two of the three consonants in the sequence are a geminate cluster, that degemination takes precedence in cluster reduction. This appears to be a strictly linear fact that has nothing to do with syllable structure positions. However, if
consider that consonant clusters can always be interpreted as consisting of individual consonants, even if that deletion is a less a typical consonant. Therefore, a consonant cluster licensed by syllable structure, then there is a single interpretation of another consonant in an onset position. In both cases cluster reduction follows automatically from the strict account of syllable structure. In Southern Paiute the licensing of a consonant cluster resort to evidence that the alternating stress pattern in the consonant position in the Southern Paiute syllable structure can then be seen as a requirement that a consonant be a single interpretation. Where two different consonant clusters are domi- nated by /t/, then this takes the lowest sority consonant in the marked case. Where the two /t/ are identical (i.e., consonant clusters), then /t/ still unify a single interpretation since the two /t/ it dominates send no distinct feature autonome where a consonant cluster must be in the same position as the position, and the facts in question here do not contradict the syllable structure and sority approach to cluster reduction in the Southern Paiute.

Southern Paiute

In Southern Paiute there is an additional problem: /t/ is marked as a single interpretation since the two /t/ it dominates send no distinct feature autonome where a consonant cluster must be in the same position as the position, and the facts in question here do not contradict the syllable structure and sority approach to cluster reduction in the Southern Paiute.

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REFERENCES