

Identity Avoidance in Korean Reduplication

Korean has a type of reduplication used for adjectival or adverbial ideophones. Normally, the reduplicant consists of a full copy of the base. When the base begins in a vowel, a consonant is inserted in the reduplicant (underlined in the data):

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| (1) | a. | alok- <u>talok</u> | ‘pied’ | (alveolar stop) |
| | b. | ulak- <u>pulak</u> | ‘wild’ | (bilabial stop) |
| | c. | umuk- <u>tʃumuk</u> | ‘unevenly hollowed’ | (palatal affricate) |
| | d. | upul- <u>k’upul</u> | ‘windingly’ | (velar stop) |

I argue that while the choice of an inserted consonant is not completely predictable, it is also not arbitrary. The basic generalization is that the inserted segment is never identical in both place and manner to the neighboring consonants. However, the segment to be inserted is not completely determined. For example, /t/ is epenthesized in (1a) but /p/ in (1b), although the bases contain the same set of consonants, i.e., /l/ and /k/. Furthermore, the choice of the inserted consonant does not depend on the vowels in the base. /p/, /tʃ/, and /k’/ are epenthesized respectively in (1b-d) even though they are followed by the same vowel /u/. Therefore, I argue that any segment out of a set of consonants is acceptable, subject to identity avoidance.

I present evidence supporting this claim from a corpus-based analysis of V-initial bases where the reduplicant has an inserted consonant, and from an experiment I conducted in which Korean native speakers were asked to form reduplicated versions of nonce words. In sum, the examination of VCVC-bases, in particular, both in the corpus and the word creation experiment shows that there is a general tendency toward identity avoidance between the inserted C and its base consonants in terms of place and manner. Between these two factors, place has a greater effect in discriminating the inserted C and its base consonants, and this reminds us of the restriction in Arabic verbal roots in which a combination of consonants with the same place of articulation are disfavored. The results of the corpus analysis are not simply replicated in the word creation task, but the effect of Identity Avoidance is even stronger in the word creation task.

The evidence from both the corpus and the word creation task demonstrates that Identity Avoidance in terms of place and manner serves as a crucial factor in determining an inserted sound. The Korean data is not an isolated case where reduplication is based on the gradient identity avoidance. Similar patterns have been found in Turkish, English, Javanese, Muna, etc. (Yip 1997; Coetzee and Pater 2005).

Selected references

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