

The Feature Hierarchy of Korean Consonants in Speech Error

The research on speech error has gained popularity among linguists, as the slips data provide useful evidence regarding the structure of linguistic units and their interactions in the mind. However, in Korean, relatively few have attempted to incorporate such a psycholinguistic result into developing their theoretical framework. So, the current paper aims to deepen our knowledge of consonantal features, highlighting their functional roles during the speech production based on slips of the tongue from a natural corpus.

So far, I have gathered a total of 350 substitution errors of Korean consonants caused by a shift into a neighboring, incorrect segment. The frequency rates of occurrence were found to be greatly varied relative to consonant type, and this asymmetry seems largely attributed to the differences across place, manner and laryngeal features associated. To examine the hierarchy of feature distribution, I chose 12 features individually — labial, alveolar, palatal, velar, continuant, strident, nasal, lateral, voice, spread glottis, stiff vocal cords, and constricted glottis, and grouped them into 3 categories, namely, Place, Manner and Laryngeal.

Besides, to determine a featural value for controversial segments, I further used the slips data as crucial evidence for the appropriate feature specification. For instance, Kim (1997, 1999, 2001) argues that Korean affricates are alveolars, rather than a palato-alveolar as traditionally assumed, with findings from her articulatory and acoustic study. However, the slips data indicate that out of 14 slips for the palatal glide /j/, the majority (11 slips, 79%) originated from an unlawful interchange between an affricate /c/ and /(C)j/ or between /c^h/ and /C^hj/, respectively. Such a high propensity between the affricates and palatal glide cannot be taken into account unless we assume the two share the same place feature, namely [+palatal]. Moreover, Iverson (1983) and Kang (2000) point out that /s/, despite being a lax, has a heavy aspiration, more equivalent to the aspirated series. In line with this claim, the slips data showed that /s/ interacted with an aspirated (15 slips, 21%) more often than a lax stop, and also exhibited a wider range of selection even with a heterorganic segment /c^h/ (14 slips, 19%), with which a typical lax is prohibited to interact. That supports the view above that the /s/ is [-stiff vocal cords] as a lax, but [+spread glottis] like an aspirated.

Concerning the feature hierarchy, Korean consonants were found to be violatable in the order of Place (202) > Manner (159) > Laryngeal (97). That place features are the most susceptible to errors seems to have a cross-linguistic validity, as previous pen-and-paper research usually came up with a similar outcome, irrespective of languages in corpora (Dell 1980, Berg 1985, Jaeger 1992, Wan 1999). However, the current study is of importance in a sense that it shows a clear and complete within-category ranking that previous studies neglect: namely for Place (alveolar > palatal > velar > labial), Manner (continuant, strident > liquid > nasal) and Laryngeal (voice > spread glottis > stiff vocal cords > constricted glottis).

