

A Sociophonetic study of tones on Jeju Island

In this paper I discuss the results of an apparent-time sociophonetic study on the emergence of a tonal distinction in Jejeuo, a critically endangered Koreanic language spoken on Jeju Island, South Korea, and the Jeju variety of Korean spoken by younger generations on the island. The three-way stop contrast in Korean, between fortis, lenis and aspirated voiceless stops, is well documented. In recent years the length of the VOT which comprised the primary phonetic distinction between lenis and aspirated stops has been reducing across many varieties of Korean. At the same time, vowels following the merging lenis and aspirated stops have developed low and high pitch, respectively. The shifting of cues from VOT to f_0 for Korean stop consonants can be described as tonogenesis (Silva 2006). With the degree of influence that the highly prestigious Seoul variety of Korean has on media and education, tonogenesis has spread outward from the Seoul/ Gyeonggi province area (Choi 2002).

In this sociophonetic study I investigate whether Seoul tonogenesis has spread to the farthest Korean province. In developing this project I partly replicated Cho et al.'s (2002) study on Jeju, to determine whether younger generations maintained the VOT distinction that Cho et al. reported in older generations, or whether a tonal distinction was developing. I elicited data from 3 age demographics: Jeju Korean speakers age 18-30, Jejeuo speakers age 40-60, and Jejeuo speakers 75 and over. The results show that the older group maintains the VOT distinction between lenis and aspirated stops typical for native Jejeuo speakers. By contrast, the younger group demonstrates a merged VOT for lenis and aspirated stops (Figure 1). In terms of a tonal distinction, all participants produced a difference in pitch between vowels following lenis stops (low pitch) and aspirated stops (high pitch), but this distinction was most pronounced in the younger group. On average, the younger group produced vowels following aspirated stops with a 40Hz higher pitch (Figure 2).

The results of this apparent-time sociophonetic study show that tonogenesis has spread outward from mainland Korea and has entered Jejeuo for all speakers, but to varying degrees, based on extralinguistic factors of age, language dominance in Korean or Jejeuo, and attitudes toward Jejeuo. Finally, this study has implications for the literature on language loss and also sound change, as language dominance and attitudes are shown to contribute to phonological attrition of heritage language in a diglossic environment.

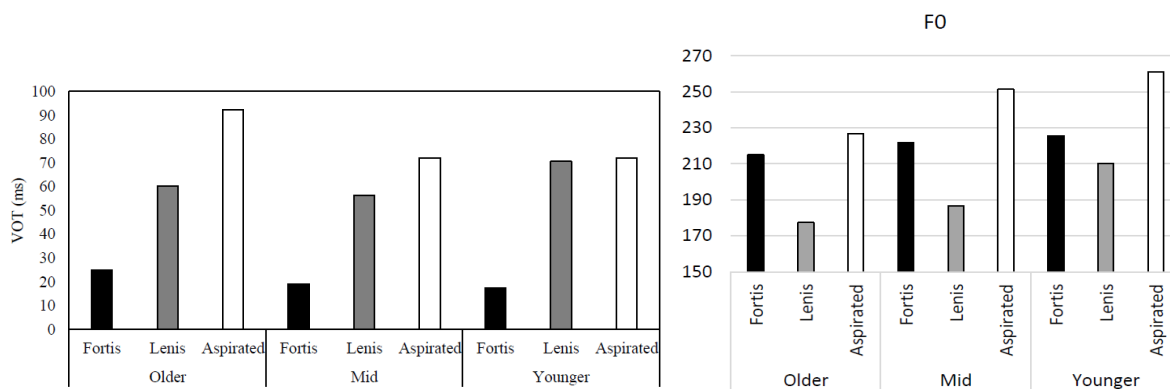


Figure 1. VOT by consonant type and age group

Figure 2. f_0 by consonant type and age group

References

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