

# A Study on Phonological, Syntactic, and Lexical Variables

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## I. Introduction

Trudgill(1974) argues that a study of language totally without reference to its social context inevitably leads to the omission of some of the more complex and interesting aspects of language and to the loss of opportunities for further progress.

If we view language in terms of social context, we can not but deal with regional dialects and social dialects. Unlike the old societies, in modern societies speech patterns tend to be formed by the social class more than by geography. But Fasold and Wolfram(1973) suggests that in dealing with the interaction of social forces with language variation, we must always bear in mind that social dialects exist in the context of regional variation.

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Kyungsangdo dialect is one of eight regional dialects in Korea. This dialect is characteristic of its preservation of old forms of the Korean Language. From our exceedingly limited data we will investigate the factors which make this regional dialect unchanged in a small homogeneous society like Korea. We will examine them in linguistic and social perspectives.

## II. Sample

The informant I interviewed is a female from Kyungsangdo and in the middle of thirties. She was born and raised in a large village of Kyungsangdo until she was graduated from elementary school there. So she was exposed to this dialect most of those days except when she was in school. She finished her secondary education in a big city of the same province and lived there until last year.

In a sense it is no doubt difficult to make generalizations about a dialect from the speech patterns of a particular informant. However, the interviewer himself was born and brought up in the same province. We had much easier access to collection of our desirable data in much the same way as Baugh gathered the data he wanted from BEV. What is different is only in terms of numbers of informants.

## III. Investigation

We will investigate two phonological variables, and one syntactic and one lexical variables. First, we will examine /ɪ/ variable as far as we establish a phonological rule for this variable and then explain this phenomenon in sociolinguistic terms.

Another phonological variable we will deal with is intervocalic /b/ in comparison with that of Standard Korean. This one is characteristic of Kyungsangdo dialect. However, no one has ever tried to explain this phenomenon in terms of sociolinguistics. We will provide good explanation for

it in our sociolinguistic terms.

Endings in Korean are believed to show one of the most salient linguistic and social markers. The ending /-ye/ is another phenomenon which has not investigated in the social and linguistic perspectives. This ending which has been favored by female speakers in Kyungsangdo region is not stigmatized as a nonstandard dialect.

The last variable we will investigate is a lexical one. Both/dowa/and/kædʔlə/ have the same meaning, but the former is used in a formal and informal situation across the age and region. On the other hand, the latter has somewhat limited range of use. We will go into details later.

#### 1. Word-initial vowel /ɨ/ before sonorant consonants.

An analysis of our data reveals that a great number of /i/variants for the standard Korean /ɨ/ occur in word-initial vowel position which immediately precedes sonorant consonants. The above phonological phenomenon occurred in the following words :

KD	SK	
/sinim/	/sinim/	monk
/silsil/	/silsil/	slowly
/diryə/	/diryə/	give
/zilkəpke/	/zilkəpke/	joyfully
/silə/	/silə/	sweep

No dialectologists and sociolinguists in Korea has ever observed and tried to explain this phenomenon in terms of linguistics or sociolinguistics. However, the results of our investigation provide strong evidence that the above phenomenon is a very salient phonological phenomenon in Kyungsangdo dialect.

Let's consider the frequencies of /i/ occurrence in comparison with /ɨ/ in the same environments.

variant	number	%
SK : /ɨ/	12	33.3
KD : /i/	24	66.7
total	36	100

Figure 1: Comparison of variants for /ɨ/ with a word initial coronal consonants.

The frequency of occurrence of Kyungsangdo dialect(68.6) is unexpected and surprising results, since women are generally believed to feel more status-conscious and more sensitive to speech patterns than men. Especially, our female informant who is a high school graduate in her middle thirties is often said to be most sensitive to the prestigious standard speech form. Nevertheless, why did our informant show highly frequencies of occurrence of nonstandard form /i/ instead of /ɨ/ in her speech? We will explain the phenomenon in terms of Korean vowel system and social forces. In order to understand this phenomenon, it is necessary to have some knowledge of the vowel system of Middle Korean. Yang-soo Moon(1974) gave the vowel system of Middle Korean as follows :

Figure 2

Middle Korean

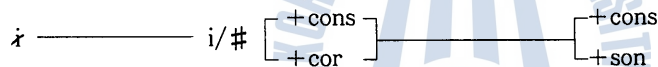
Short vowel			long vowel		
i	ɨ	u	$\bar{i}$	$\bar{i}$	$\bar{u}$
	ə			$\bar{a}$	
ɸ	o		$\bar{a}$	$\bar{o}$	
	a				

/ɨ/ is a short tense vowel, so the pronunciation of /ɨ/ is more difficult than that of /i/. Therefore, to give /i/ sound instead of /ɨ/ in words mentioned early may not be recognized as a socially stigmatized form particularly in Kyungsangdo and in Korea as a whole.

Another explanation of the phenomenon above requires the background

knowledge of the old traditionally Confucianism-dominated society of Korea. According to the people at that time, a person who moved his tongue and lips too much in his speech was generally believed to be from the low and working class. Especially, women of a noble family were required not to show their teeth when they spoke to others. This traditional value of the people may have influenced the pronunciation of /i/ instead of /ɪ/. As mentioned early, most of people in Kyungsangdo are well-known to be conservative traditionally. Therefore, it is natural that our informant from Kyungsangdo used /i/ variant so often in her speech. This may be the reason for the pronunciation of /i/ instead of /ɪ/ in our informant.

Finally, we can posit a phonological rule to account for this phenomenon. It is formulized as follows :



We can not give order constraints from the given limited data, but the rule generally indicates that the most favoring environment of occurrence of /i/ is whether the preceding consonants are word-initial coronal or the following consonants are obstruent consonants. A reanalysis of /i/ variant doesn't reveal any statistical significant trend which shows that the preceding environment is more favorable than the following environment or vice versa.

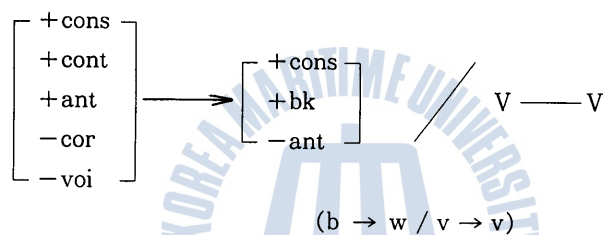
## 2. Retention of intervocalic /b/.

Another interesting phenomenon which showed much frequency of occurrence was found in the retention of intervocalic /b/. This phonological phenomenon may occur in words like :

KD	SK	
/chubəs/	/chuwəsə/	cold
/dəbəs/	/dəwəsə/	hot
/nubəsə/	/nuwəsə/	lie
/kubə/	/kuwə/	roast
/kobəsə/	/kowəsə/	beautiful

In order to understand this phonological phenomenon, once again it is necessary to date back to the period of Middle Korean. We will first examine this phenomenon in terms of historical linguistics. And then we will consider the social factors that have resisted the deletion of intervocalic /b/.

According to the Korean linguists, the intervocalic /b/ had undergone some change sometime during the sixteen century in the Korean language. After that, /b/ is realized with /w/ between two vowels. This result has been received in standard Korean. The rule for this phenomenon in standard Korean may be formulated as follows:



In contrast, KD(Kyungsangdo dialect) still has the old form in words in figure 3. Let's consider occurrence of the intervocalic /b/ in our informant.

Figure 4.

	Numbers of occurrence	%
/b/ deletion	6	40
/b/ retention	9	60
total	15	100

What made our female informant use the high percentage of /b/ retention form? Why is KD believed to have more old forms of the Korean language than any other regional dialect?

Shuy(1967) suggests that there must be three reasons for dialect differences in America. Patterns of settlement history and of population shift are not relevant to the explanation of Korean regional dialects. His third factors affecting dialect differences are patterns of physical geography.(p. 33—38)

On the basis of Shuy's arguments, Wolfram and Fasold(1973) maintains that mountain ranges, islands, and other isolated areas often become 'relic areas' in

which the older forms of a language are preserved(p.74). These explanations are no doubt necessary for a regional dialect. But they are not sufficient explanations for Kyungsangdō dialect. Why? Kyungsangdo province is a place where has been developed earlier than any other region in terms of culture and transportation. Kyungsangdo dialect has some peculiar aspects of a dialect from my point of view. For the purpose of our complete understanding of them, it is extremely necessary to know the characteristics of people in that region and the situation which the region has had, not to mention the matter of physical geography.

Kyungsangdo, one of eight provinces in Korea, which was once the central part of Korean history, has produced so many famous scholars and politicians from the old dynasties to the present. Particularly, since 1960 modern Korea has been shaped by both of the presidents who are from this region.

This, by tradition people in this region tend to believe that they have some sort of superiority to people in other regions in Korea. They have been proud of things Kyungsangdo. Accordingly, they have not been subject to any change from outside the region. No wonder conservatism has become a tradition to people in this region. This is observed as a main reason why so many old forms of Korean have been preserved in this dialect and people there take pride in the use of the dialect even today.

In the same vein, we can find our answer to the first question. Women who are often said to be very sensitive to nonstandard forms of speech need not pay too much attention to the use of this dialect. As said early, this nonstandard dialect is not recognized as a stigmatized form which is used by an uneducated and low-class person. This may be the main reason why our female informant used this dialect so often in her speech. In a sense the dialect provides the varieties of the Korean Language. Therefore, the study of Kyungsangdo dialect is significant in both regional and social perspectives.

### 3. Social meanings of ending /ye/.

It is said that there are two main functions of speech : conveying informational messages and reinforcing interpersonal relationship. Formal

endings are suitable for the former and informal endings for the latter. It is well-known that Korean has so many varieties of endings. If we don't know about the proper use of different endings in different situations, we can not behave properly in Korean society. The endings in Korean represent so many aspects of social stratification.

However, we will investigate the meanings of ending -ye in a totally different perspective.

Figure 5

endings	types	number	%
-yo	SK	60	70.6
-ye	KD	25	29.4
Total		85	100

Figure 5 plainly indicates that informal ending -yo of standard Korean was used more frequently than that of Kyungsangdo dialect.

The ending -yo is widely used in informal conversations, especially by female speakers. It is recognized as a form of speech which expresses something soft, lovely and indecisive. This is why the ending is favored by female speakers. Interestingly, male speakers who are highly educated and live in the urban areas tend to use this form in their daily conversations. This phenomenon seems to be closely related to the fall of men's status in a Korean society, especially to the equal status of men and women in Korea today. As said before, the -yo ending is an interesting phenomenon in terms of relationship between speech and social change. But this is not our major discussion, so I don't go into any details.

Let's consider now the ending -ye which is a main interest to our discussion in this section. The ending -ye represents a kind of deferential form which is used only by female speakers in this region. This ending, like the above-mentioned ending -yo of standard Korean, is considered to be an expression which is something feminine, lovely, indecisive, and attractive. The ending -yo is shared between men and women, On the contrary, the ending -ye is used



only by women.

Trudgill's (1974) suggestions that women consistently use forms which more closely approach those of the standard variety or the prestige account than those used by men are far from the explanation of –ye case. And then What is the reason?

As mentioned early, the Korean society, by tradition, has been a Confucianism-dominating one. In such a society, a decision of the family totally depended on father but not on mother at all. That is to say, women could not play a role in deciding family affairs like today, besides cooking and raising children of the family. It is argued that women could not use the same decisive and determined endings as men could under any circumstances.

It is quite natural that the ending used only by female speakers was developed in a conservative region. Women were not allowed to express their opinions explicitly in this traditionally conservative region.

Another aspect of the ending –ye is that this ending sounds exceedingly lovely. When female speakers wanted to arrest the mind of men, they used this form intentionally. These are the main reason why female speakers still use the ending –ye which male speakers never use except when they are joking. Therefore, our informant used this form so often in her speech.

#### 4. A lexical variable

A lot of lexical variables were found in our data, but occurred only once or twice. The lexical variable we will investigate is as follows :

Figure 6

/dopta/	formal & informal	help	4
/kədilta/	informal	help	3

/dowa/ in our data has the same meaning as /kədilə/ (help). The former can be used in both formal and informal situations. On the other hand, the latter is usually used by adults in informal situation

Let's consider our data.

- |  |         |
|--|---------|
| (1) ……선생님의 일손을 /dowa/ 주러……                       | (p. 3)  |
| (… go to kids' school to help teacher …)         |         |
| (2) ……복사 같은 것/dowa/주고 ……                         | (p. 3)  |
| (… help teachers to copy …)                      |         |
| (3) ……교육자료를 준비하는데 일손을/dowa/고 ……                  | (p. 3)  |
| (… help teachers to prepare teaching material …) |         |
| (4) ……친구집에 가서 일손도/dowa/주고 ……                     | (p. 9)  |
| (… help in many ways …)                          |         |
| (5) ……여러가지 일손도/kədilə/주고 ……                      | (p. 9)  |
| (… help in many ways…)                           |         |
| (6) ……아이 어른들끼리 다 일을/kədilə/주고 ……                 | (p. 11) |
| (… Everybody helps farmers to reap …)            |         |
| (7) ……누가 충고라도/kədil/지오 ……                        | (p. 19) |
| (… to advise and help her classmates …)          |         |

As is apparent from the above examples, /dowa/ in (1) through (3) may be used in formal situation where our informant talked about helping her kids' teachers at school. In contrast, /dowa/in(4) is used in informal situation where she mentioned helping her friend. Therefore, /dowa/can be used either in formal situation or in informal situation without regard to social status, age, region, and sex.

/kədilə/in (5) and (7) must be used in informal situations where our informant refers to helping her friends. When she talked about helping an unspecified person, she also used this form /kədilə/. So we can say that this form is usually used among adult male or female equals who are close friends. It is sometimes used asymmetrically by a senior speakers to a young addressee. Therefore, we conclude that the word/dowa/can be used to any person in any situation, but the applicability of the word/kədilə /is limited.

Thus far we have discussed two phonological, one syntactic and one lexical variables. The frequency of lexical variable was excluded in the following figure 6.

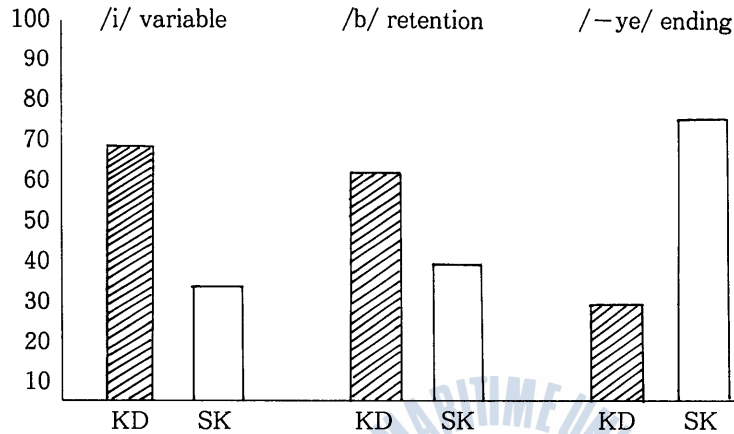


Figure 6. Covariation between Kyungsangdo dialect and standard Korean in /i/variable, /b/retention, and /-ye/ ending.

From the figure 6 we can see that syntactic variable shows sharp stratification than phonological ones. This results are the same as those of Wolfram and Fasold(1973) who made the study of the 'r' phonological variable and the '-Z' grammatical variable.

#### IV. Conclusion

So far we have investigated two phonological, one syntactic, and one lexical variables from the data of our interview. It has been noted that some social forces have an important role in making a regional dialect unchanged for a long time. Furthermore, it has been seen that distance explanations for a regional dialect differences are not sufficient for Kyungsangdo dialect. What we have discussed so far may provide strong evidence that we can't deal with a regional dialect in a real sense without a complete understanding of characteristics of people and the unique history of the region. That is to say, to know language situation is indispensable to the understanding of a regional dialect and a social dialect.

One more thing we have observed in the analysis of our data is that people's attitude toward their language can play a key role in a regional dialect. A regional dialect, along with a social dialect shows not only change of a language but characteristics of people.

Though we gathered our data from a female informant, we can be sure that we succeeded in getting enough data we wanted to collect. On the basis of these data we have tried to account for some aspects of a regional dialect which no one ever attempted to explain. We might say that we have a satisfactory answer to the question 'What makes a regional dialect unchanged?'

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## Abstract

The primary concern of this study is with the investigation of phonological, syntactic, and lexical variables which exist in certain dialect, based upon very limited data collected from a female informant by means of interview. This study is also concerned with the explanation of these variables from the sociolinguistic perspectives.

First, this study deals with /i/ variable and intervocalic /b/ in comparison with those of standard Korean in terms of phonological rules.

Second, this study examines the ending /ye/ which is believed to show one of the most salient linguistic and social markers in the syntactic perspective.

Finally, this study investigates a lexical variable which has appeared in the speech of the informant again and again through the interview from the sociolinguistic perspective.

