

Dorsal Consonant Harmony in Truku Seediq

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Abstract

Seediq is a Formosan language belonging to the Atayalic subgroup (Li 1981). This paper reports a (morpho-) phonological process called dorsal consonant harmony found in the language with the data based on the Truku dialect. It involves the two contrastive segments—voiceless velar stop /k/ and voiceless uvular stop /q/, while the latter is derived in morphophonemic contexts. This process not only operates between morpheme boundaries, but also within morpheme roots, showing that */k...q/ sequence is unattested, and only very few /q...k/ sequence are found. However, with the introduction of the rule which changes the labial to a velar at word-final position, this root-internal restriction is gradually loosened (cf. Li 1980). An observation of the data also reveals that hetero-morphemic alternation only applies to derivational prefixes, where the root is always the trigger, hence right-to-left directionality. Theoretically speaking, this assimilation process is considered as non-local correspondence rather than just simply spreading of the dorsal feature [high] (Hansson 2001, McCarthy 2006), since the intervening oral segments are rather transparent to the operation without any opacity effect, i.e. the intervening vowels are lowered only if immediately adjacent to a uvular. The theoretical interpretation is provided following the model of contrastive hierarchy in phonology (Dresher 2003, Mackenzie 2005) and feature specification of the both segments, suggesting that the segment /q/ in this language possesses double domination (McCarthy 1994) in both oral and pharyngeal cavities, thus enforces the harmony of a hetero-morphemic /k/ in order to erase segmental paradox. A similar morpheme-internal harmony is also mentioned in the other Atayalic dialects such as Sqliq and Skikun (Li 1980). A diachronic implication gained from this observation is that dorsal consonant harmony is probably a pan-Atayalic phenomenon.

References

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