Paradigm Leveling in American Korean*

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This study examines a simplified version of the Korean language spoken by the Korean-American 'heritage' speakers in America, which is dubbed American Korean (AK) in this paper. This paper focuses on the elimination of morphophonemic alternation, i.e., a case of paradigm leveling, in the conjugation of irregular verbs of Korean. It is argued that the morphological change has been triggered by the speakers' sociolinguistically biased exposure to the pragmatic system of speech level marking of Korean and that as a consequence, the verbs of American Korean have all been re-parsed as free, vowel-final morphemes.

Key words: American Korean, heritage speakers, bilingual, language attrition, paradigm leveling, verb conjugation, analogy, morphophonemic alternation, pragmatically motivated, speech level.

1. Introduction

American Korean (AK hereafter) is a reduced version of the Korean language that is spoken by ethnic Koreans in the United States of America. The speakers of AK are usually 1.5 or later generation Korean-Americans whose mother or both parents are native Korean immigrants to the U. S.1) These speakers have been significantly exposed to natural input in which Korean was spoken by their parent(s) and/or other native speakers of Korean (Kim, 2001). To these speakers, Korean is usually their first language (L1), the language that they first acquired from their

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1) Kim (2001) reports that it is rare that the children acquire the language if only the father, but not the mother, is a native speaker.
parent(s) at home, but in most cases, Korean is not maintained as their primary language: English is their primary language. It is probably because English is the language of education, and of economic, social, political, cultural, and other prestige (Polinsky, 1996). In other words, most of the more than one space AK speakers are English-dominant bilinguals.

Typically, AK speakers demonstrate high-level receptive skills and communicative fluency but show weaknesses in vocabulary and grammatical accuracy (Kim, 2001). That may be because they usually learn the language informally at home in spoken style, but they rarely receive formal school education in or about the language. What is interesting is that even those speakers who do receive formal education about the language later in their life (e.g. by taking Korean courses in college) do not really go beyond the level of proficiency that they have already acquired in childhood, particularly more so in certain areas of the language: AK speakers show distinct patterns of errors, for instance, in verb conjugation, which are sometimes more persistent than those made by true foreign leaners. Studies from naturalistic L2 (second language) acquisition have shown that prolonged natural exposure tends to stabilize the speakers' interlanguage prematurely, making them fail to incorporate grammatical structure and thus fossilize their semilanguage despite the high frequency of input and plenty of opportunity (Long, 1997, p. 156). Although heritage acquisition certainly differs from L2 acquisition in many respects, there seems to be a similarity in that some less-than-perfect form of language has been prematurely stabilized and fossilized unlike the case of true L1 acquisition: a heritage language starts as L1 and grows to a certain point where the speaker acquires the basic communicative fluency; but discontinues its growth and thus fails to fully develop to be a true L1.

As a result, AK, spoken by these semi-lingual heritage Korean-Americans, deviates from the full version Korean that is spoken by regular native speakers of Korean (Native Korean or NK hereafter) and displays various signs of attrition (see Polinsky (1996) for similar signs of attrition in American Russian). Some of the typical signs of attrition in AK are: frequent code-switching or code-mixing (due to limited command of vocabulary); simplification or reduction of complex sentence structures; misuse, overuse, or omission of function words and inflections; and elimination of morphophonemic alternations.

This paper focuses on the morphophonemic aspect of the deviation and
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2. Verb Conjugation in American Korean: Paradigm Leveling

2.1. Verb Conjugation in Native Korean (NK)

Morphophonemic change often occurs through analogy and analogical change brings paradigm leveling in the morphology (Hock & Joseph, 1996, among others). This is what happens with the paradigm leveling

2) For example, many AK speakers uses only -ka, not -i, for the nominative case marking, overusing -ka and thus simplifying the phonological selection process between the two. Another example is the overuse of the embedded-clause suffix -nikka 'because' even for the situations that call for the use of -a/ase, or -ki tauymwuney, which also simplifies the semantic selection process for the AK speakers.

3) The data were not collected by means of controlled experiments with a fixed group of subjects, but rather through informal observations with occasional recording and note-taking. About 150 Korean-American college students were observed who had intermediate or higher spoken fluency in the Korean language at University of California at Riverside, University at Buffalo the State University of New York, and Claremont-McKenna College (California). Although the speakers varied a great deal in terms of the frequency that they incorrectly conjugated the verbs and also the kind of verbs that they made the errors in, almost all the speakers used incorrectly-conjugated verb forms on a regular basis, which led us to believe that they were not simply accidental errors that were made once but corrected next time. To make the arguments more strongly supported, a systematic quantitative analysis should be in order, as pointed out by an anonymous reviewer. I leave it to a future research.
taking place in the verb conjugation of AK, which is a process of regularizing the irregular verbs. The irregularity of the irregular verbs emerges when the verb stem meets with a verbal suffix. As is implied by paradigm leveling, AK shows different patterns from Native Korean in conjugating these irregular verbs. Let us see the case of Native Korean (NK) first.

As is well known, Korean morphology is agglutinative: both nouns and verbs are affixed by a variety of suffixes. This suffixation is mandatory for verbs because all verbs (including adjectival verbs) are bound morphemes in Korean. Every verb stem must be supported by at least one verbal suffix, i.e. by either a sentence ender or an embedded clause ender (Sohn, 1999). See (1) below.

(1) Morphological Structure of Korean Verbs
Vstem - (Hon.) - (Tense/Modal) - End
(sentence enders, embedded-clause enders)

In NK, most verb stems remain intact when they are attached by the verbal suffixes. That is, there are no morphophonemic alternations for regular verbs. See (2) below.4)

(2) Conjugation of Regular Verbs (NK) → No Alternations
Deferential Intimate ‘and’ ‘because’

a. pat- ‘receive’: pat-supnita pat-a/ə pat-ko pat-unikka
b. ip- ‘wear’: ip-supnita ip-ə ip-ko ip-unikka
c. ppays- ‘snatch’: ppays-supnita ppays-ə ppays-ko ppays-unikka
d. ka- ‘go’: ka-pnita ka-(a) ka-ko ka-nikka

The first two suffixes, -(su)pnita and -a/ə, are sentence-ender suffixes that indicate the sentence type (Declarative, Interrogative, Imperative, or Proposative) and speech level (Deferential, Polite, Blunt, Familiar, Intimate, or Plain5), and the last two suffixes, -ko and -(u)nikka, are embedded-clause enders,6) others of which also include complementizers, conjunctives,

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4) For all the examples that follow, Yale Romanization System is adopted, except that /e/ is replaced by /ə/.
5) This classification of speech level follows Sohn (1999).
6) I follow Sohn (1999) in calling all non-sentence-ending verbal suffixes embedded-clause
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relativizers, nominalizers and quotatives (Sohn, 1999, pp. 302-326). As can be seen in (2d), when the verb stem ends in a vowel, -pniita is used instead of -supnita for the Deferential-level, Declarative suffix. Similarly, for the embedded sentence ender ‘because’, u drops if the verb stem ends in a vowel, and thus -nikka is used instead of -unikka. This u-drop commonly happens with many other verbal suffixes as well. The a/ə alternation of the Intimate-level suffix is a product of vowel harmony: a verb with the vowel /a/ or /o/ in the stem takes the a-form; otherwise, the ə-form. The same alternation occurs in other suffixes too, including the past tense suffix -ass/-əss.

There are, however, a set of irregular verbs, which carry alternations when they encounter suffixes. For example, each verb in (3) represents three different subgroups of irregular verbs, i.e. t-irregular, p-irregular, s-irregular, and h-irregular, where the last consonant of the verb stem is weakened or dropped when the first sound of the suffix is a vowel as in the Intimate-level suffix or the embedding conjunctive ‘because’. In other words, the last consonant is weakened intervocally.

(3) Morphophonemic Alternations in Irregular Verbs (NK)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Deferential</th>
<th>Intimate 'and'</th>
<th>'because'</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. tut- 'listen':</td>
<td>tut-supnita</td>
<td>tul-ə</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. swip- 'be easy':</td>
<td>swip-supnita</td>
<td>swiw-ə</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. nas- 'get better':</td>
<td>nas-supnita</td>
<td>na0-a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. coh- 'be good':</td>
<td>coh-supnita</td>
<td>co0-a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In (3a), the stem-final /t/ of the t-irregular verb tut- 'to listen' turns to /l/ if the suffix starts with a vowel as in the Intimate-level suffix -ə (in the second column) or the conjunctive -unikka 'because' (in the fourth column). Similarly, in (3b), the stem-final /p/ alternates with /w/. In (3c) and (3d), the final /s/ and /h/ drop respectively before a vowel in the Intimate-level suffix and the conjunctive ‘because’.

2.2. Paradigm Leveling in American Korean (AK)

Let us now shift to the AK (American Korean) case. As mentioned above, the alternations that were shown above in the irregular verbs of

enders' for the purposes of this paper.
NK (Native Korean) disappear in AK\(^7\) in other words, the verb conjugation paradigm has been leveled. One may easily expect that AK, as an attrited language, may have undergone morphophonemic simplification, and through analogy, the above irregular verbs have been regularized. What draws our attention now is how they are leveled or regularized, that is which of the two alternate forms prevails. One might predict that these irregular verbs would behave regularly just like other regular verbs of NK, as shown in (2), and that the consonants of the original stems would stay unchanged. Hence, for tut-, for instance, /tut/, not /tul/, would win, thus resulting in tut-o, tut-unikka and so on. On the contrary to the prediction, however, it so happens that the alternations have been eliminated so that the weakened forms such as /tul/ prevail. Namely, the paradigm has been leveled to the opposite direction. See (4) below.

(4) Elimination of Allomorphy in AK: Paradigm Leveling

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Deferential</th>
<th>Intimate</th>
<th>‘and’</th>
<th>‘because’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. tut-:</td>
<td>tul-U-pnita</td>
<td>tul-o</td>
<td>tul-U-ko</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. swip-:</td>
<td>swiw-U-pnita</td>
<td>swiw-o</td>
<td>swiw-U-ko</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. nas-:</td>
<td>nao-U-pnita</td>
<td>nao-a</td>
<td>nao-U-ko</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. coh-:</td>
<td>coo-U-pnita</td>
<td>coo-a</td>
<td>coo-U-ko</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In AK, the stem-final consonants are weakened even before the consonant-initial suffixes, e.g. tulUpnita and tulUko. Or rather, the weakened forms, i.e. /tul/, /swiw/, /na/, and /co/, behave as if they were new stems, and they conjugate accordingly with no alternations. Note that the capitalized /U/ is used to indicate the speaker variation in the pronunciation of the vowel where [u] and [a/o] are alternating: for example, some speakers say swiwunikka whereas other speakers say swiwunikka. It is not clear whether the vowel /U/ belongs to the stem or to the suffix in such cases as tulUnikka, swiwUnikka, naUnikka, and coUnikka; for the suffix ‘because’ can be either -nikka or -unikka\(^8\). However, since there

7) It is not claimed that every Korean-American speaker conjugates the verbs equally and exactly as below. There certainly are variations among speakers as expected. However, the following are the typical patterns of deviation that most heritage Korean-American speakers make, and thus can be said to be characteristic of AK.

8) For the verb coh-, some speakers insert [w] before /U/ (which is usually [a] in this case), hence cowapnita, cowa, cowako, cowanikka.
is no such alternation in the case of -\(\text{-pnita}\) and \(-\text{ko}\), it seems that the vowel \(/U/\) belongs to the stem. This issue will be further discussed later in section 3. (5) are some actual examples where AK speakers conjugate the irregular verbs in (4) differently from NK speakers. The forms in parentheses are the regular forms that NK speakers use.

(5)

a. hip-hop umak-ul maynnal tulu-ciman (tut-ciman) 
   hip-hop music-Acc every day listen-but
   ‘(I) listen to hip-hop music every day but...’

b. cikum-un pwumonim-ilang kati caental-i ta swiwu-ko (swip-ko) 
   now-Top parents-with together communication-Nom easier-and
   ‘Now the communication with the parents is much easier and...’
   (Lee, 1999, p. 174)

c. kamki-ka nau-ci (nas-ci) anh-ayo. 
   cold-Nom get well don't-Pal
   ‘The cold doesn't get better.’

d. amma-ka na-lul cou-key (coh-key) hay-yo. 
   mom-Nom me-Acc good-Adv do-Pal
   ‘Mom makes me feel good.’

2.3. The Direction of Paradigm Leveling

Let us now examine what has driven this change in AK. Simplification and regularization through analogy seems to be a natural process, especially for those speakers who have limited exposure to the language: one single morpheme per verb rather two allomorphs should be definitely more attractive to those speakers. We could hypothesize then that AK speakers reanalyze the stems for these irregular verbs as \(/\text{tul}/\), \(/\text{swiwr}/\), \(/\text{na}/\), and \(/\text{co}/\) respectively and treat them as regular verbs, putting aside the question of \(/U/\) for now. Then the question is: why the weakened forms? why not the original stems? The question becomes more puzzling when we consider some dialects of Korean where some of these verbs behave like regular verbs but the direction of leveling is just the opposite to that of AK: they keep the original stems. See (6) below.
(6) Different Direction of Paradigm Leveling in Some Dialects of Korean
(Kyengsang, Hamkyeng, Cenla, Chwungcheng Dialects)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Deferential</th>
<th>Intimate 'and'</th>
<th>'because'</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. swip- 'be easy':  swip-supnita</td>
<td>swip-ə</td>
<td>swip-ko</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. nas- 'get better': nas-supnita</td>
<td>nas-a</td>
<td>nas-ko</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Kyengsang, Hamkyeng, Cenla, and Chwungcheng dialects, the verbs like `swip-` and `nas-` are not irregular verbs unlike in the standard dialect. Therefore, the stem-final consonant stays unchanged even before the vowel-initial suffixes, as shown in `swip-ə`, `nas-a`, `swip-unikka`, and `nas-unikka`. This makes us wonder why AK does not follow the path of other Korean dialects.

In fact, there are other languages in which paradigms had been leveled in two different directions along the path of the historical change. English and German are such examples. In Old forms of English and German, there was an alternation between `/s/` and `/r/`, known as Verner's Law, in such verbs as `choose`, `lose`, `freeze`, and `rise`, which underwent leveling and settled with `/s/`. There are also verbs that did not go through the leveling. The `be` verb is a typical example: the past tense of the `be` verb has two forms, `was` and `were`, a trace of the alternation between `/s/` and `/r/`. Compare (7) and (8) below. In Modern English, the paradigm is leveled with `/s/`, as shown in (7), but in German, with `/r/`, as in (8) (Hock & Joseph, 1996, pp. 155-156).

(7) **OE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>cçosan (present)</th>
<th>Mod.E</th>
<th>choose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>cças (past sg.)</td>
<td>chose</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>curon (past pl.)</td>
<td>choose</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ge)coren (past partic.)</td>
<td>chosen</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(8) **OHG**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>kiosan (present)</th>
<th>NHG (archaic)</th>
<th>kuren</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>kős (past sg.)</td>
<td>kor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kurun (past pl.)</td>
<td>koren</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(gi)koran (past partic.)</td>
<td>gekoren</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This is analogous to the Korean situation where in AK the paradigm is leveled with the weaker consonants, whereas in Kyengsang and other dialects it was leveled with the strong consonants. Then, is the direction of leveling simply accidental and unpredictable? Assuming that it is
predictable, we will try a hypothesis in the remainder of this section, which, however, will be rejected later.

2.4. An Influence from English?

One could hypothesize that the preference for the weakened consonants in AK was caused externally by a similar phenomenon in English, i.e. intervocalic weakening. Since intervocalic weakening is a phonetically natural process that happens frequently in American English of which AK speakers are also speakers of, it can be hypothesized that they would weaken the consonants of the Korean verbs in the intervocalic position. For instance, tut-ə [tul-ə] in Korean could be compared to totter [taDr] in English.

However, this hypothesis is undermined if we look at the conjugation pattern of other irregular verbs of Korean such as l-irregular and lu-irregular verbs. The paradigm leveling in AK cannot be explained by intervocalic weakening alone because for these verbs the paradigm is leveled to the direction where the consonants are strengthened rather than weakened. Compare (9) and (10).

(9) Other Irregular Verbs (NK)

Deferential  Intimate ‘and’  ‘because’

a. pwul- ‘blow’: pwu0-pnita pwul-ə pwul-ko pwu0-nikka
b. molu-‘not know’: molu-pnita moll-a moll-ko moll-nikka

(10) Other Irregular Verbs (AK)

Deferential  Intimate ‘and’  ‘because’

a. pwul-: pwulU-pnita pwul-ə pwulU-ko pwulU-nikka
b. molu-: mollU-pnita moll-a mollU-ko mollU-nikka

In (9a), which is the conjugation paradigm of the l-irregular verb pwul- ‘to blow’ in NK, /l/ gets dropped before a consonant like /p/, /s/, or /n/. In (10a), which is the counterpart in AK, the whole paradigm does keep, not drop, the /l/. Similarly, the lu-irregular verb molu- ‘to not know’ in (9b) doubles /l/ only before a vowel-initial suffix in NK. In AK, the paradigm is leveled such that the /l/ is always doubled regardless. Here again, the capital /U/ indicates the speaker variation which ranges between [u] and [ə/a]. (11) are examples of such cases in AK.
(11) a. thulemphet-ul pwulu-nun (pwu-nun) sihap
   trumpet-Acc blow-Mod competition
   'trumpet-blowing (playing) competition' (Kim, 2000, p. 239)

b. iyu-nun molla-ciman (molu-ciman)
   reason-Top don't know-but
   'I don't know the reason but...' (Kim, 2000, p. 239)

The examples in (10) and (11) weaken the hypothesis that intervocalic weakening, which is supposedly an influence from English, is responsible for the direction of the paradigm leveling in AK.

A stronger piece of evidence against the English-influenced intervocalic weakening hypothesis comes from the conjugation of regular verbs by AK speakers. Consider (12) below. In (13) are some actual examples. Compare this with the irregular verb case in (4).

(12) Regular Verbs (AK)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Deferential</th>
<th>Intimate</th>
<th>'and'</th>
<th>'because'</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. pat-:</td>
<td>pat-U-pnita</td>
<td>pat-a/ə</td>
<td>pat-U-ko</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. ip-:</td>
<td>ip-U-pnita</td>
<td>ip-ə</td>
<td>ip-U-ko</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. ppays-:</td>
<td>ppays-U-pnita</td>
<td>ppays-ə</td>
<td>ppays-U-ko</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. ka-:</td>
<td>ka-pnita</td>
<td>ka-(a)</td>
<td>ka-ko</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(13) a. os ipu-nun (ip-nun) ka
   clothes wear-Mod thing
   'that (somebody) is wearing clothes' (Kim, 2000, p. 239)

b. changphihay sacin ppaysu-ko (ppays-ko)
   embarrassing picture take away-and
   'taking away that embarrassing picture' (Kim, 2001, p. 263)

The final consonants (in (12a) through (12c)) in this set of verbs, i.e. regular verbs, are not weakened even in the same intervocalic environment in AK. This clearly shows that the English-influenced intervocalic weakening is not a viable hypothesis. It also shows that the paradigm leveling with the weakened form in (4) was not triggered phonologically because obviously the AK speakers differentiate the irregular verb in (4) and the regular verbs in (12) in the same phonological environment.

To summarize, we have seen three sets of examples of AK verb
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conjugation above: in (4), the paradigm is leveled with the weakened form; in (10), the paradigm is leveled with the strengthened form; finally in (12), the paradigm is leveled with the original consonant. In other words, the direction of leveling is not consistent, so cannot itself provide an explanation. Instead, what is common in all these examples is that the vowel /U/ ([u] or [a/a]) is consistently inserted between the original stem and the suffix. It appears that the key to the AK conjugation has something to do with this vowel insertion. I will examine the nature of this vowel insertion in the next section and pursue two hypotheses regarding where it came from: whether it is phonologically motivated or pragmatically originated. The nature of the vowel insertion also gives the answer to the question of direction of leveling itself. It will be argued that the leveling in AK is driven by the pragmatics of speech-level marking system, which is dramatically limited in AK due to a very special socio-linguistic context in which AK is used.

3. Analysis: Preferred Syllable Structure or Speech Level?

3.1. Preferred Syllable Structure CV

As mentioned above, what is commonly noticeable in all the AK examples in (4), (10) and (12), is that, unlike NK speakers, AK speakers insert a vowel /U/ between the verb stem and the suffix. If we look more closely, the vowel does not seem to be inserted before a vowel-intial suffix, i.e. the Intimate-level suffix. This fact naturally leads us to the following hypothesis. That is, AK speakers have a strong preference for the CV syllable structure, so they insert a vowel /U/ to avoid consecutive consonants CC: so, whenever the verb ends in a consonant and the suffix begins with a consonant, they insert a vowel /U/. As a result, the /U/-insertion always creates the intervocalic condition for the irregular verbs in (4), not only before the originally vowel-initial suffixes like the Intimate-level suffix or the embedded clause ender 'because' but also before the consonant-initial suffix like Deferential-level suffix -(su)pniita and -ko 'and'. In other words, it can be assumed

9) In the case of 'because', we could analyze either that /U/ is inserted to the stem and the suffix is -nikka or that /U/ belongs to the suffix, thus -unikkia. Either way, it does not make a difference in the current discussion.
that AK speakers, knowing that the verbs in (4) are special verbs different from the regular ones in (2), weaken the final consonants in the intervocalic position, which is now with every suffix, thus paradigm leveling.

As a matter of fact, all vowel-initial sentence-enders or embedded-clause enders of Korean begin with /U/, namely either /a/ or /u/, as shown in (14a) below. Actually, the /u/-initial suffixes drop /u/ if the verb stem ends in a vowel, as shown in ka-nikka in (2d) or (12d). In other words, this suffixal /u/-deletion is a mechanism of Korean (NK) to reinforce the preferred CV syllable structure. We could thus hypothesize that AK speakers overgeneralize this mechanism to the originally consonant-initial suffixes in (14b) as well, and always insert a vowel, i.e. /U/, between a consonant-final stem and a consonant-initial suffix. To put it in other words, all verbal suffixs are vowel-/U/-initial for AK speakers.

(14) Sentence Enders and Embedded-Clause Enders (Sohn, 1999)

a. V-initial: -a/a, -a/la, -a/sa, -a/taka, -a/to, -a/yo, -(u)lla, -(u)llay(-yo), -(u), -(u)lkey(yo), -(u)lyoko, -(u)ma, -(u)meoy, -(u)myan, -(u)myanso, -(u)na, -(u)ni, -(u)nikka, -(u)o, -(u)psita, -(u)sipsio

b. C-initial: -ca, -ci (Neg), -ci(yo), -ciman, -ktun, -key (Fam.), -key, -ki, -ki wihayso, -ki taymwuney, -ko(Inf.), -ko, -ko(so), -kwun(-yo), -na, -ney (Fam.), -ney(-yo), -ni, -nula(ko), nula-myon, -(nu)anka, -(nun)ta, -(nun)tey, -nunya, -nya, -nikka, -ptita, -sey, -so, -supnita, -ta, -taka, -talato, -tolok, -tunci

This syllable-structurally-motivated hypothesis, however, does not work for the following vowel-final verbs in (15) or (17). For NK speakers, the vowel-final verbs show vowel contraction when followed by the vowel /a/ or /u/, as illustrated in the Intimate-level ending in (15), e.g. pwa, ssawo, chya, ha, and hay. However, when followed by an /u/-initial suffix such as -unikka, /u/ gets dropped as mentioned above because there is a vowel already before the suffix, i.e. in the stem, and hence no contraction takes place, e.g. po-nikka, ssawu-nikka, chi-nikka, khu-nikka, and ha-nikka.
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Verbs with Vowel Contraction in NK:

<table>
<thead>
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<th>'because'</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. po- 'see':</td>
<td>po-pnita</td>
<td>pwa</td>
<td>po-ko</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. ssawu- 'fight':</td>
<td>ssawu-pnita</td>
<td>ssawo</td>
<td>ssawu-ko</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. chi- 'hit':</td>
<td>chi-pnita</td>
<td>chye</td>
<td>chi-ko</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. khu- 'be big':</td>
<td>khu-pnita</td>
<td>khe</td>
<td>khu-ko</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. ha- 'do':</td>
<td>ha-pnita</td>
<td>hay</td>
<td>ha-ko</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The ha-verbs show an interesting contraction pattern when ha is followed by the $a/a$ suffix. Since the vowel of the ha verbs is $a/a$, the suffix should be $a$ too (according to the Vowel Harmony), and therefore the contracted form should be ha (not hay), just like the case of ka 'to go' in (2d). Some treat the ha verbs as irregular verbs, which somehow conjugate differently. Others trace the origin of the irregularity back in the history and argue that the original stem of the ha verb is /haj/, not /haj/, and thus conjugates in a different manner. For the purposes of this paper, it does not matter significantly how to treat the ha verbs except that hay is the contracted form of ha and $a/a$.10) The contraction patterns for the verbs in (15) are summarized below in (16).

Vowel Contraction Patterns in Verbal Morphology

- a. o-a $\rightarrow$ wa
- b. wu-o $\rightarrow$ wo
- c. i-o $\rightarrow$ yo
- d. u-o $\rightarrow$ a
- e. haj-o $\rightarrow$ hay

Recall that the vowel-final verbs do not involve the /U/-insertion for AK speakers either because the CV structure is already ensured in that case: hence, ka-ko, ka-nikka, for example, not ka-Uko, ka-Unikka, as shown in (12d). Therefore, we can expect that the same pattern of conjugation that the NK speakers have shown in (15) will follow for AK speakers as well. This expectation, however, does not hold. See (17) and

10) Some treat the u-verbs such as khu as irregular verbs as well, analyzing that the vowel /u/ is in fact dropped before a vowel, not contracted. Just like the case of ha-verbs, however classified the verbs are, what is of concern in this paper is the fact that khu and a turns to kha.
(18) below.

(17) Verbs with Vowel Contraction in AK

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Deferential</th>
<th>Intimate</th>
<th>‘and’</th>
<th>‘because’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. po-:</td>
<td>pwa-pnita</td>
<td>pwa</td>
<td>pwa-nikka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. ssawu-:</td>
<td>ssaw-pnita</td>
<td>ssawa</td>
<td>ssawa-nikka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. chi-:</td>
<td>chya-pnita</td>
<td>chya</td>
<td>chya-nikka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. khu-:</td>
<td>kha-pnita</td>
<td>kha</td>
<td>kha-nikka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. ha-:</td>
<td>hay-pnita</td>
<td>hay</td>
<td>hay-nikka</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(18) a. sacin an pwa-ko (po-ko) siph-yo.

picture not see-to want-Pol

‘(I) don’t want to see the picture.’ (Kim, 2001, p. 263)

b. ssaw-ci (ssawu-ci) ma-la.

quarrel don’t

‘Don’t fight.’ (Lee 1999: 168)

c. theynisu-lul cal chya-nikka (chi-nikka)

tennis-Acc well hit-because

‘Because (I) play tennis well’

d. na tongsayng-i khao-nikka (khu-nikka)

my brother-Nom big-because

‘Because my brother is bigger (taller).’

e. swukcey-lul ta hay-myan (ha-mygn)

homework-Acc all do-if

‘If (I) have done the homework’ (Lee, 1999, p. 168)

Surprisingly, the AK speakers use the contracted form of [the verb stem + a/a], namely the Intimate-level form, as the base of the entire paradigm. namely, as if it were a new stem. It seems that the AK speakers insert a vowel /a/ or /a/ for no reason for these verbs. Recall that these are vowel-final verbs, so there is no reason that a vowel should be inserted to avoid two consecutive consonants. Therefore, we can conclude that the vowel-insertion (which was represented as /U/ insertion) that we have seen above in (4), (10), and (12) is not phonologically triggered to ensure the preferred syllable structure CV and to avoid CC.

The conjugation pattern in (17) also shows that the inserted vowel /U/, whether it is [a/a] or [u], is part of the stem, not of the suffix. For AK speakers, the contracted vowels are an unanalyzable chunk acting as a
whole throughout the paradigm. We see no cases in (17) where the stem vowel is separated from the /U/ unlike in (15): we see no traces of po, ssawu, chi, khu, and ha. In other words, the new unanalyzable wholes such as pwa, ssawa, chya, khu, and hay are new stems for AK speakers. Therefore, all AK verbs are vowel-final, not that all AK verbal suffixes are vowel-initial.

3.2. Speech Level: Intimate-level Form as New Stem

If the vowel addition to the stem is not motivated by the CV syllable structure, then where does that come from? The data in (17) leads us to the next hypothesis. That is, the vowel comes from the Intimate-level suffix a/a. Namely, the Intimate-level form functions as the base for other conjugation. This hypothesis directly explains the vowel-contracted new stems in (17); since the vowel insertion is not motivated to break two consonants, it can work after a vowel too, as in the vowel-final verbs in (17). It can also account for the data in (4), (10), and (12). The examples are repeated below.

(4) Irregular Verbs in AK

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Deferential</th>
<th>Intimate</th>
<th>'and'</th>
<th>'because'</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. tut-:</td>
<td>tulU-pnita</td>
<td>tulə</td>
<td>tulU-ko</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. swip-:</td>
<td>swiwU-pnita</td>
<td>swiwə</td>
<td>swiwU-ko</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. nas-:</td>
<td>naU-pnita</td>
<td>naa</td>
<td>naU-ko</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. coh-:</td>
<td>coU-pnita</td>
<td>coa</td>
<td>coU-ko</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(10) Other Irregular Verbs in AK

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Deferential</th>
<th>Intimate</th>
<th>'and'</th>
<th>'because'</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. pwul-:</td>
<td>pwulU-pnita</td>
<td>pwulə</td>
<td>pwulU-ko</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. molu-:</td>
<td>mollU-pnita</td>
<td>mollə</td>
<td>mollU-ko</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(12) Regular Verbs in AK

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Deferential</th>
<th>Intimate</th>
<th>'and'</th>
<th>'because'</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. pat-:</td>
<td>patU-pnita</td>
<td>pata/ə</td>
<td>patU-ko</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. ip-:</td>
<td>ipU-pnita</td>
<td>ipə</td>
<td>ipU-ko</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. ppays-:</td>
<td>ppaysU-pnita</td>
<td>ppaysə</td>
<td>ppaysU-ko</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. ka-:</td>
<td>ka-pnita</td>
<td>ka</td>
<td>ka-ko</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Intimate-level forms of the irregular verbs in (4), i.e. *tula*, *swiwa*, *naa*, *coa*, are the ones that are intervocally weakened and therefore easily explain why the weakened forms prevail in the paradigm. Also, the reason that /I/ does not drop before -nikka for the l-irregular verbs as in *pwulUnikka* of (10a), and that /I/ doubles before non-\(a/\) suffixes too for the lu-irregular verbs as in *mollUnikka* of (10b), is because the Intimate-level forms *pwula* and *molla* respectively are the ones that keep and double /I/ for those verbs. Finally, it also explains why a vowel is inserted for the regular verbs in (12): it is exactly because the Intimate-level suffix is that inserted vowel. Also, for the vowel-final verb *ka*- in (12d), the Intimate-level form is also *ka* due to the invisible vowel contraction (where the same two vowels /aa/ are contracted to a single /a/), which explains why it looks as if no vowel were inserted in that case. To reiterate, all the AK verbs illustrated above have a vowel added as part of the stem and that vowel is the Intimate-level suffix \(a/\).

The only remaining question is then why we see a variation in the vowel /a/\(a/\) so that it is sometimes instantiated as [u]. In fact, the vowel alternation frequently happens in AK, even in nouns, for example, [apaci] ~ [apuci] ‘father’. It is probably because AK speakers, being speakers of English, have difficulty distinguishing [a/\(a/\)] and [u]. Also /a/\(a/\) and /u/ are the most common two vowels that are used in verb conjugation. As a matter of fact, these are the only two vowels that begin verbal suffixes, as illustrated in (14). So, it is very likely that the AK speakers identify them as one general ‘verbal’ vowel, not being able to distinguish them. It is interesting to see, though, that the speakers rarely use the Intimate-level form itself with the vowel [u] replacing the original /a/\(a/\), which seems to demonstrate that they hear the form as a whole and so parse it.

The data in (4), (10), (12), and (17) show that AK speakers reanalyze the Intimate-level forms to be new stems and conjugate the verbs accordingly. To put it in other words, the paradigms are leveled based on the Intimate-level form in AK. Then, why the Intimate-level form? Before we answer this question, we need to understand what the Intimate level is. The Intimate level is one of the six speech levels in Korean: Deferential, Polite, Blunt, Familiar, Intimate, and Plain. This is illustrated in Table 1 below. The speech level is one of the many honorific-marking mechanisms available in Korean, which reflects the speaker's relationship with the addressee (Sohn, 1999, pp. 236-238). Depending on the difference
in age, social rank, job hierarchy, family relationship, etc. between the speakers, a different speech level is used. Each level is marked by a separate sentence-ending suffix. Roughly speaking, the Deferential-level is the most formal and polite, the Intimate is the least, and the Plain-level is mainly for neutral writing. The Intimate level is used mostly between siblings, close friends, from parents to children, and sometimes from children to parents too.

Table 1. Speech Level Marking in Korean

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Suffix</th>
<th>Deferential</th>
<th>Polite</th>
<th>Blunt</th>
<th>Familiar</th>
<th>Intimate</th>
<th>Plain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Act. Verbs</td>
<td>(su)pnita</td>
<td>a/a yo</td>
<td>so/uo</td>
<td>ney</td>
<td>a/a</td>
<td>((nu)n)ta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>maksupnita</td>
<td>makayo</td>
<td>makso/uo</td>
<td>makney</td>
<td>maka</td>
<td>makanunta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>kapnita</td>
<td>kayo</td>
<td>kao</td>
<td>kaney</td>
<td>ka</td>
<td>kanta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>coh supnita</td>
<td>co(h)ayo</td>
<td>cohso/uo</td>
<td>cohney</td>
<td>co(h)a</td>
<td>cohta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>khupnita</td>
<td>khoyo</td>
<td>kuo</td>
<td>khuney</td>
<td>khoe</td>
<td>khuta</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The answer to the question why the Intimate-level form is taken to be the verb stem by AK speakers can be rather simple if we understand the speech context where the AK speakers use Korean. The Korean language in America is used in a highly limited socio-linguistic context. It is used mainly as 'home' language between parents and/or between parents and children. They use English otherwise: in schools, in job places, in churches, in stores, namely almost everywhere else than home. They usually speak English even at home if not with parents, i.e. between siblings. In addition to that, they are rarely exposed to written or formal Korean, which would introduce Deferential or Plain levels. Therefore, the speakers are mostly exposed to the Intimate level (Lee, 1999; Kim, 2001) and possibly to the Polite level, but rarely to the other levels (Blunt and Familiar levels are becoming rare even among NK speakers). Interestingly enough, the Intimate and Polite levels are the only two ones whose suffixes start with a vowel, i.e. a/a yo and a/a respectively. This provides the vowel for all the examples and consequently creates the environment for the consonant weakening in (4), consonant retaining or doubling in (10), and the vowel contraction in (17). Moreover, the past tense morpheme, which is one of the most frequently used verbal morphemes, happens to be aas/ass, i.e. another a/a-initial morpheme.
Unlike NK speakers, AK speakers do not receive school education in the Korean language and thus lack grammatical knowledge and awareness about the language. Therefore, they do not have chance to learn what the original verb stems are. They cannot learn them only by hearing natural speech because Korean verbs are all bound morphemes and hence never show up alone, i.e., without suffixes or inflections. Assuming that they would hear the Intimate-level form, Polite-level form, and Past Tense form most often, it is very likely that they parse the verb stems to be the Intimate-level form, as in (19a) or (19b). Compare these with the Native ones in (19a') and (19b'). To summarize, the AK speakers' inventory of inflectional suffixes is like (20).

(19) AK Verbs Reparsed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stem-Intimate</th>
<th>Polite</th>
<th>Stem-Past-'because'</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. tula-Ø</td>
<td>tula-yo</td>
<td>tul-yss-unikka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a'. tul-ø</td>
<td>tul-yo</td>
<td>tul-ass-unikka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. pwa-Ø</td>
<td>pwa-yo</td>
<td>pwa-ass-unikka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b'. po-a</td>
<td>po-ayo</td>
<td>po-ass-unikka</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(20) AK Verb Stems and Suffixes

AK Stem = Intimate (NK Stem + ø/a)

Polite: -yo
Past Tense: -ss

One might wonder then if the AK speakers would never have heard the verbs with consonant-initial suffixes as in (14b) including -(su)pnita 'Def.' and -ko 'and'. The AK speakers must have heard the verbs with these suffixes and then should be able to recognize the original verb stems: for example, tut-ki ttaymuwuney, po-myensæ, and so on. We cannot argue that they would never have heard these forms. Yet, one thing we should note about AK is that their syntax is highly limited, mostly simple sentences. Because they use Korean mainly with their parents at home, the language tends to be short and simple, not involving complicated sentence structures with embedded clauses. Therefore, it can be assumed that they construct the stems based on the forms they hear most frequently, i.e., Intimate, Polite, and Past Tense, and overgeneralize the newly-constructed forms when they have to conjugate with other suffixes.

Before closing, let us see another piece of evidence that supports the
current analysis: it comes from code-mixing data. AK speakers often mix Korean and English in their speech even in a single sentence, and when they insert a Korean verb within an English sentence, they use it in the Intimate-level form, not in the original stem. This is illustrated in (21).

(21) Code-mixing examples (AK)
   a. That is very swiwa ('easy')
   b. I gotta kongpwuhay tonight. ('study')
   c. Can you towacwɔ me? ('help')

The examples in (21) further confirms that AK speakers treat the Intimate-level form not only as an unanalyzable chunk but in fact as the basic verb form.

4. Conclusion

As illustrated above, AK (American Korean) shows signs of attrition in terms of elimination of morphophonemic alternations in verbal morphology. It is mainly due to the incomplete acquisition of the language by AK speakers, which was caused by the highly limited learning environment. The status of AK as 'home' language presents the heritage learners a pragmatically biased setting. This bias toward the casual spoken language deprives the speakers of the opportunity to be equally exposed to the whole scale of speech levels. As a result, the AK speakers end up identifying the Intimate-level form, not the original stem, as the basic verb form. Consequently, all AK verbs are vowel-final and also free morphemes (which can stand alone) unlike the NK (Native Korean) verbs, which are bound morphemes.

To conclude, this simplification process in verbal morphology of AK can be characterized as a pragmatically-conditioned, internally-induced change. The direction of the change is set by the internal structure of the language, not by any external influence from another language, namely English. The internal grammar of Korean that has the pragmatic honorific system of speech-level marking motivates and facilitates the whole process. In other words, a simplification in the pragmatics induces the simplification in the morphology.

This predicts that a similar change can emerge in any pragmatically
limited environment. In a sense, eliminating irregularity itself may not be so surprising. What is special about the AK case is that the change is sensitive to pragmatic registering. If we could find a dialect of Korean—preferably another heritage one—that is more formally inclined, e.g. where a formal register, Deferential level, for instance, is most often used, we should predict that the paradigm would be leveled in a totally different direction. As a matter of fact, Chinese Korean in Yenbian, China seems to be good candidate for a future comparative research. Alternatively, if we find a dialect that is similarly oriented toward an informal register just like AK, then we should expect to see a similar pattern of leveling. For this purpose, the NK children’s language would be a good source.

In fact, this type of errors are found in L1 child acquisition of NK too11): e.g. phwungsen-ul pwul-umyen ‘if (we) blow the ballon’. This is understandable considering that the early learning environment is usually casual, spoken, and limited at home, before children start their school education. What is different from AK is that young NK speakers grow out of these errors as their learning environment expands and the exposure to speech level goes beyond the Intimate and Polite levels. However, this opportunity to complete acquisition is prematurely stopped for AK speakers and their incomplete language is fossilized.

What makes it more interesting is that despite some formal education in the language in college and after, AK speakers have a hard time fixing their old habit of conjugation as adult speakers: the prior knowledge from the childhood often becomes an obstacle to achieving accuracy. In some cases, heritage speakers have more difficulty in getting the verb conjugation right (or rather in accepting that their old habit was wrong) than non-heritage L2 learners. In fact, L2 learners tend to show a different pattern of errors: they level the paradigm based on the original stem, just the opposite to the AK speakers. See examples in (22) below. The forms in parentheses are the regular NK forms.

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11) Regularization of irregular verbs through analogy is actually common in children’s language. It is well-known, for example, that child speakers of English use goed instead of went for the past tense of the verb go at an early stage of their acquisition.
(22) Verb Conjugation Errors by Non-Heritage Learners (Lee, 2001)

   ‘Listening and reading has become easier.’

b. hankukmam kongpwuha-nun kas-i **alyap**-unikka (**alyawu**-nikka)
   Korean studying-Top difficult-because
   ‘Because studying Korean is difficult’

c. cey yeca chinkwu-nun **il ha**-ya ha-myən (**il hay**-ya hamyən)
   my girl friend-Top work- have to if
   ‘If my girl friend has to work’

d. congkyo kwamok-ul **tani**-ya toy-ss-ki ttaymwun-ey (**tanya**-ya)
   religion subject-Acc go-have to-Pst-because
   ‘Because I had to take (too many) religion classes.’

In (22a) and (22b), the p-irregular verbs **swip** ‘be easy’ and **alyap** ‘be difficult’ are used in their unweakened forms, and in (22c) and (22d), the vowel-contraction verbs **ha** ‘do’ and **tani** ‘attend’ are used uncontracted. This shows that non-heritage learners level the paradigms with the original stems. It is probably because their adult L2 learning accompanies ‘textbook and grammar’ from the beginning, which would certainly introduce the notion of verb stem and balanced exposure to speech level. This contrast between the AK speakers and the learners confirms that the verb conjugation patterns by the AK speakers are not accidental errors but the outcomes of the already acquired knowledge of Korean which must have been established and fossilized early on in their life.

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