

Empty Nuclei in Korean

This thesis investigates a number of phonological phenomena in Korean, within the framework of Government Phonology, all related to the presence/absence of the vowel [ɪ]. The distribution of the vowel [ɪ], unlike that of other vowels, is highly constrained and predictable. This observation is captured by the proposal that empty nuclei are postulated underlyingly when [ɪ] appears and also between consonant clusters. Thus, multiple empty nuclei can be present in a given lexical representation.

It is shown that the phonetic interpretation of empty nuclei in various contexts provides an adequate account of relevant phonological phenomena. The interaction of the Empty Category Principle, the Preservation Principle and a language-specific constraint on licensed empty nuclei determines the distribution of [ɪ] in morpheme-internal position, non-analytic suffixation, and in loanwords. In particular, head-final inter-onset government together with the notion of government-licensing account for the majority of cases where [ɪ] appears. In analytic suffixation, unless the requirements of inter-onset government are met, various phonological processes are triggered to adjust the segmental shape such as post-nasal voicing, tensification and nasalisation.

This thesis is of interest to phonologists studying Government Phonology and/or Korean phonology, and to researchers interested in the topic of loanword phonology.

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