Topics in the phonology of Konai, a Papuan language of New Guinea (abstract)

Konai is a Papuan language spoken on New Guinea. It possesses numerous phonological processes that often interact with one another. In this dissertation, I first describe the general phonology of the language before presenting analyses of these processes. Although descriptions of the phonetics and phonology of Konai have previously been produced, to my knowledge, no significant analytic work has been done. The data used are taken from Årsjö & Årsjö (2005), a chiefly descriptive account based on fieldwork with native speakers of Konai. These data are analysed mainly within an autosegmental framework.

The vowel inventory in Konai consists of the following: /i/, /u/, /o/, /ɛ/, /ɑ/ and /ɔ/. These are involved in several processes that can be described as vowel harmony, such as backness, rounding and height harmony. Other phonological processes include ablaut, various strategies of hiatus resolution and 'bleed-through' whereby high vowels may be copied into adjacent syllables (potentially leading to metathesis).

Backness harmony in Konai is analysed as progressive spreading of [±back]. However, /ɑ/ is unspecified for this and is also opaque. In this instance, backness is spread by a parasitic process of 'parallel (dis)agreement' between the trigger and target with respect to [±high] and [±round]. Rounding harmony is shown to be regressive delinking of [-round] and spreading of [+round]. Konai also exhibits regressive height harmony between high vowels in which /i/ raises preceding instances of /ɛ/ by the delinking and spreading of [±high]. However, when /ɛ/ follows /i/, it does not lower it. The processes referred to as o- and a-assimilation are not so amenable to autosegmental analysis due to the underspecification of the feature [±high] on /o/ and [±back] on /ɑ/.

This dissertation provides analyses of the various phonological processes in Konai and also offers solutions to the problems that are raised by the data.

Full citation:

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