

Syncope in Namklaw (sample term paper)

WARNING: DO NOT USE ANY WORDS FROM THIS SAMPLE TERM PAPER

1. Introduction

Namklaw is a Namklawic language spoken in the Southern province of Noisevelet. The goal of this paper is to present and document a phonological rule of Syncope in Namklaw, based on evidence elicited from a native speaker.

My consultant for this paper, Charles Rotsisnaret, is a native speaker of Namklaw. He comes from Semagoediv, the largest city of the Southern province. He says he speaks something fairly close to the standard dialect of the language, used in education and in broadcasting. Charles lived in Semagoediv for all of his life up to the age of 23, at which point he moved to Los Angeles to study electrical engineering at UCLA. He has lived here for the past two years, and is quite fluent in English.

My project has benefited greatly from the analysis of Namklaw phonology given in Billerey (2003). Billerey covers most of the major phonological rules of Namklaw, including the process of Syncope focused on here. In what follows, I will first summarize Billerey's account of Namklaw, then present my own data and suggest how Billerey's analysis might be revised to cover Charles Rotsisnaret's speech.

2. Billerey (2003)

The phonemic inventory of Namklaw, according to Billerey, is as follows:

(1) ...

Another source, Smith (1968), lists two additional phonemes, /ϕ/ and /β/. Words that have these sounds in Smith (1968) always are pronounced with /f/ and /v/ in the dialect Billerey describes. Apparently some dialects of the language preserve an older stage in which /ϕ/ and /β/ were separate phonemes, but in the Billerey dialect these have merged with older /f/ and /v/ respectively. Since the merger took place in all contexts, there is no justification for setting up an underlying /ϕ/ or /β/ in the Billerey dialect.

Charles Rotsisnaret apparently has the same phonemes as Billerey's consultants. Although he is familiar with other people's pronunciations with /ϕ/ and /β/, he says that in his own speech he only says /f/ and /v/.

Stress in Namklaw typically falls on the third to last syllable. Billerey expresses the rule as follows:

(2) **Stress Assignment:** $\sigma \rightarrow ' \sigma / \text{ ___ } ((\sigma) \sigma)]_{\text{Word}}$

Here are some examples of antepenultimate stress in Namklaw, taken from Billerey.

- (3) [ˈlupebdo] ‘milk’ [muˈkeptilu] ‘intransigence’
 [ˈambeθi] ‘soap’ [soˈlatinde] ‘basilisk’

The central phonological rule of Noisivelet is a rule of Syncope, formulated by Billerey as follows:

(4) **Syncope**

$$V \rightarrow \emptyset / \left[\begin{array}{c} V \\ +\text{stress} \end{array} \right] C _ CV$$

That is, the vowel of the posttonic syllable deletes if it itself in a nonfinal syllable and separated from the nearby vowels by just one consonant.

Syncope creates many alternations in the language, since suffixation can vary the length of words. This causes a different syllable to bear stress, and thus a different vowel to be syncopated.

Here is a simple example of how Syncope applies. I assume that the underlying form of [ˈamla] ‘platypus’ is /amila/.

- (5) /amila/
 ˈamila Stress Assignment
 ˈamla Syncope

It can be seen that as the rules are stated, Stress Assignment must precede Syncope, since Syncope relies for its application on the position of stress, which must be established first by the stress assignment rule.

The underlying form /amila/ can be justified by looking at suffixed forms of the same stem. In these cases, there is a different antepenult, hence a different stressed syllable, and hence a different vowel syncopates. The underlying /i/ of /amila/ therefore survives in the phonetic representation.

- (6) /amila-ma/ ‘platypus-plural’ /amila-ma-nu/ ‘platypus-plural-accusative’
 aˈmilama Stress Assignment amiˈlamanu Stress Assignment
 aˈmilma Syncope amiˈlamnu Syncope

Here are some similar forms that can be derived in the same way:

(7) Gloss	Underlying form	Nom. sg. /X/	Nom. pl. /X+ma/	Acc. sg. /X+nu/	Acc. pl. /X+ma+nu/
‘friendship’	/likeso/	ˈlikso	liˈkesma	liˈkesnu	likeˈsomnu
‘yellow dye’	/asurefi/	aˈsurfi	asuˈrefma	asuˈrefnu	asureˈfimnu
...					

Billerey justifies the details of his rule as follows. First, one might wonder why the rule is formulated to delete the *post-stress* vowel, rather than the penultimate vowel. The reason is that there are a few exceptional words in which the stress falls *four* syllables from the end. In such cases, the vowel that syncopates is the third from the end, just as Billerey’s rule predicts.

(8) /luˈpatirome/	‘mongoose’
—	Stress Assignment (this form is [-Stress Assignment])
luˈpatrome	Syncope

When such forms are suffixed, the exceptional stress disappears by a rule which I will not try to formulate here. Regular antepenultimate stress is assigned, and the underlying vowel shows up:

(9) /lupatirome-nu/	‘mongoose-acc.’
lupatiˈromenu	Stress Assignment
lupatiˈromnu	Syncope

Billerey’s rule also requires that the vowel to be deleted be separated from its neighboring vowels by exactly one consonant. The need for this provision can be seen in the following forms, where there are two consonants and Syncope does not apply:

(10) /konektima/	‘extension cord’
koˈnektima	Stress Assignment
—	Syncope
[koˈnektima]	output
/mulatopra/	‘envy of better dancers’
muˈlatopra	Stress Assignment
—	Syncope
[muˈlatopra]	output

Similar forms showing the same thing are:

(11) ...

3. Syncope in the Speech of Charles Rotsisnaret

The first thing I did in checking out Charles’s phonology was to elicit from him all the examples from Billerey (2003) covering the phenomenon of Syncope, including all the examples cited above. When I elicited these forms, I got a rude shock: Charles didn’t syncopate *any* of

them. That is, he said [ˈamila], [aˈmilama], [amiˈlamanu], [ˈlikeso], and so on, down through the whole list.

One thing that I noticed about Charles speech was that it seemed rather formal, in fact almost ceremonial. In casual conversation Charles mentioned that all citizens of Noisivelet, even those who cannot themselves speak Namklaw, hold the language in high regard as the purest embodiment of Noisiveletian culture. Charles felt a little disappointed that I only wanted him to say individual words for me, since what he really wanted to do was recite the Noisiveletian national epic, a poem he has memorized by heart. (In fact, I recorded his recitation, and hope to interpret the metrical system in a future independent study project.)

All of this suggested to me that Charles was giving me his “Sunday best” Namklaw, perhaps a literary variety that is phonologically conservative. Hoping to get more authentically colloquial speech, I got Charles to agree to bring a live mike into a gathering of Namklaw-speaking friends (who themselves agreed to be recorded). After this recording was made, I transcribed a few hundred words from it, with Charles’s help.

The results were rewarding: in colloquial speech, Charles really does syncopate more or less as Billerey says. In particular, the tape revealed the following forms:

(12) ...

Once he had helped me transcribe the tape, Charles had a much better idea of what I wanted, and with some practice he was able to produce casual, syncopated forms even in elicitation.

Thus, the first conclusion I came to was the following: in Charles’s speech, Syncopation is characteristic of *colloquial style*, and does not occur in the high, formal, literary style. Later, I learned by reading the preface of Billerey’s work that for reasons of space he had deliberately limited the scope of his article to colloquial speech; and Billerey (personal communication) told me that in fact he too had occasionally found unsyncopated variants from consultants who enjoyed speaking the formal style.

There in fact appears to be one genuine difference between Charles’s speech and that of Billerey’s consultants: Charles apparently does not apply Syncopation (even in casual speech) if the consonants found on either side of syncopating vowel have the *same place of articulation*. Thus, the following examples remained unsyncopated even when Charles was intentionally pronouncing them in casual style:

(13) [ˈlupepu]	‘wolf’	[laˈfiteta]	‘sage’
[ˈlanadi]	‘persimmon’	...	
[oˈpekuga]	‘itinerant bagpiper’		

All of these forms appear syncopated in Billerey’s work: [ˈluppu], [ˈlandi], [oˈpekga], etc. I can only conclude that there is a dialect difference here. Charles thought the syncopated pronunciations sounded slightly familiar, but he has no intuitions about what geographical area or segment of Noisiveletian society uses them.

4. Tape Recording

To illustrate Namklaw Syncope in Charles's speech, Charles and I made a tape giving suitable examples. The transcript of the tape below gives underlying representations, glosses, and phonetic transcriptions for two different surface forms: a syncopated (casual speech) version, and a non-syncopated (formal style) version. All examples listed in the paper are given, in the order they appear above.

5. Summary and Conclusion

My study of Syncope in Namklaw showed pretty close agreement with Billerey's findings. There are two new results. First, in Charles's speech (and, from what Billerey says, probably pretty much everybody's), Syncope occurs only in colloquial speech; it is not found in formal styles of speaking. Second, in Charles's dialect of Namklaw, Syncope may not apply if the two consonants flanking the target vowel share the same place of articulation. These findings are summarized in the following statement of the rule for Charles's dialect:

(14) Syncope

$$V \rightarrow \emptyset / \left[\begin{array}{c} V \\ +\text{stress} \end{array} \right] C_i \text{ ___ } C_j V$$

Conditions:

- (a) Applies in colloquial speech.
- (b) C_i must have a different place of articulation from C_j .

References

- Billerey, Roger (2003) "The Phonology of Namklaw (S. Noisivelet)," *Linguistic Inquiry* 23, 255-384.
- Smith, Christine (1968) *Namklaw-English Lexicon*, Noisivelet National University Press, Noisitown.