

Hall
Ling 503
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Some additional notes on writing up homeworks

The examples in these notes derive primarily from Homework 5, the Korean and Tibetan problems from Chapter 4.

- Some terminology: an ALTERNATION is a *difference between two (or more) surface forms that you might otherwise expect would be related*. It is NOT a process, and it cannot apply to a single phone or form. Instead, alternations are where you want to focus your descriptions: e.g. “In Korean, the phones [p] and aspirated [p^h] *alternate* in some words in the dataset. For example, [p] appears at the ends of stems in the conjunctive, while [p^h] appears in the same stem in the imperative. This alternation does not always occur, however; some verbs have a plain [p] in both the imperative and the conjunctive.”
- When giving the underlying representations (URs), you only need to give the UR of each morpheme. That is, give the UR of each morpheme, but only do it ONCE! – for example, don’t continue to list every form in the conjunctive: give me the conjunctive morpheme. Or, don’t list every verb in both the imperative and the conjunctive: each morpheme should have *one* UR.
- Remember, you are not deriving one surface form from another (e.g., you are not deriving the conjunctive form from the imperative form in Korean). Instead, you are deriving all surface forms of one morpheme from a single, separate underlying form.
- All your rules must apply to all of your URs – not just some. By that I mean that every rule has the *opportunity* to apply to every UR, not that it necessarily actually applies! It is your job to describe the environment of a rule in a specific enough manner as to block its application to a particular form. For example: in Tibetan, your initial consonant deletion rule has the *chance* to apply to every form: so if you don’t specify that it only applies to word-initial CLUSTERS, then you get *[a] for “5” instead of [ŋa].
- Your rules must apply to your URs in such a way as to derive your surface representations (SRs). That sounds obvious, but a number of people gave me a set of URs plus rules that do NOT uniquely derive the SRs! Check to make sure you can apply your rules to your URs to come up with the SRs in the book. Especially in Tibetan – while it’s fine to say that any consonant C deletes in a certain environment (if that is true), it is NOT fine to say that nothing becomes any consonant C in a certain environment (unless that’s true, which it very likely is NOT). The latter rule predicts that you can get ANY consonant in a given word (e.g. in free variation) – so you could say [rgu] or [sgu] or [lgu] or [bgu] etc. for “9.” This is not the case. In Tibetan, you must specifically get [rgu], so if you want to use a consonant insertion rule, you must specify that zero becomes [r] in this context. This means you need lots of very specific and nearly impossible to formalize rules.
- Having a bunch of highly specific rules (e.g. applying to a single phone) should raise red flags. ALWAYS think about the alternative: if you posit a rule of addition (either the addition of an entire consonant or of simply a characteristic like aspiration, etc.), then think about how to formalize a rule of deletion: would it work? Why not? Often, this will help you figure out what is wrong about your own assumptions of what’s going on.