

Orthographic Influence and Vowel Adaptation in English Loanwords in Korean

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Abstract: The increasing influence of English as a global language has significantly affected the lexical systems of many languages, including Korean. As English lexical items enter Korean, they undergo various phonological and orthographic modifications in order to conform to the structural constraints of the recipient language. This article examines the role of orthographic interpretation and vowel adaptation in the phonological integration of English loanwords in Korean. Particular attention is paid to the phenomenon of orthography-based pronunciation, in which the written form of English words influences their phonological realization in Korean. The study analyzes how English vowels, diphthongs, and consonant clusters are adapted through Hangul, the Korean writing system. The findings demonstrate that English vowel contrasts are frequently simplified due to differences between the phonemic inventories of the two languages. Furthermore, English spelling conventions often play a decisive role in determining the final phonological form of loanwords in Korean. The results highlight the complex interaction between phonology, orthography, and language contact in the adaptation of foreign lexical items.

Keywords: Korean language, English loanwords, orthographic adaptation, vowel adaptation, Hangul, phonological integration, language contact.

Introduction: Language contact has long been recognized as a major driving force behind lexical change and linguistic development. One of the most visible consequences of language contact is lexical borrowing, through which languages incorporate foreign lexical elements into their own linguistic systems. In the modern era of globalization, English has become one of the most influential donor languages worldwide, contributing a substantial number of loanwords to numerous languages. Korean is no exception to this phenomenon. The integration of English lexical items into Korean has intensified particularly since the twentieth century, when political, economic, and cultural interactions between Korea and English-speaking countries increased significantly. Today, English loanwords are widely used in Korean

media, education, technology, and everyday communication. These borrowed forms are commonly referred to as Konglish, a term describing English-derived words that have been adapted within the Korean linguistic environment.

However, loanwords rarely enter a language without modification. Because each language possesses its own phonological system, phonotactic constraints, and writing conventions, borrowed words must adapt to the structural rules of the receiving language. As a result, English words entering Korean frequently undergo phonological restructuring, orthographic reinterpretation, and morphological integration. One of the most distinctive features of English loanword adaptation in Korean is the strong influence of orthography. Unlike purely phonetic borrowing

processes, Korean loanwords are often shaped by the spelling conventions of English words. Consequently, the pronunciation of these loanwords may differ significantly from their original phonetic forms. Another important aspect of loanword adaptation involves the Korean vowel system. English possesses a relatively complex vowel inventory, including numerous monophthongs, diphthongs, and central vowels. Korean, by contrast, has a more limited vowel system. Therefore, English vowels are frequently simplified or approximated when they are adapted into Korean. This article aims to analyze the role of orthographic interpretation and vowel adaptation in the phonological integration of English loanwords into Korean. By examining a variety of examples, the study demonstrates how the interaction between phonology and orthography shapes the structure of loanwords within the Korean language.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The study of loanword adaptation has been a central topic in linguistic research for several decades. Early studies by Weinreich (1953) emphasized that lexical borrowing is not a random process but rather a systematic phenomenon influenced by structural differences between languages. According to Weinreich, borrowed words undergo structural adaptation in order to conform to the phonological and grammatical rules of the receiving language.

Haugen (1950) further developed the theoretical framework of borrowing by distinguishing between importation and substitution. Importation refers to the transfer of lexical material from the donor language, whereas substitution occurs when elements of the receiving language replace foreign linguistic structures. More recent research has explored the phonological mechanisms underlying loanword adaptation. Kenstowicz (2005) and Kang (2010) argue that phonological adaptation is largely influenced by perceptual similarity, meaning that speakers substitute unfamiliar sounds with the closest available segments in their native phonological inventory. In the context of Korean linguistics, several scholars have investigated the integration of English loanwords into Korean phonology. Sohn (1999) provides a comprehensive description of the Korean phonological system and

explains how foreign sounds are adapted through substitution and phonotactic adjustment. Lee and Ramsey (2011) discuss the historical development of the Korean language and highlight the increasing influence of English on Korean vocabulary. Another important factor in loanword adaptation is orthography. Crystal (2003) notes that in many cases the written form of a word influences its adaptation in the receiving language. This is particularly relevant in the case of English, whose spelling system does not always correspond directly to pronunciation. Despite these important contributions, the interaction between orthography and vowel adaptation in Korean loanwords has not been examined in sufficient detail. This study seeks to address this gap by analyzing how English spelling conventions influence vowel representation and pronunciation in Korean loanwords.

METHODOLOGY

This research adopts a qualitative linguistic analysis of English loanwords used in modern Korean. The data analyzed in this study consist of commonly used loanwords appearing in Korean dictionaries, media sources, and everyday language.

The analysis focuses on two main aspects:

1. Orthographic influence in loanword adaptation
2. Vowel adaptation and simplification

Loanwords were examined in order to identify patterns of phonological modification and orthographic reinterpretation. Particular attention was paid to cases where the Korean representation reflects English spelling rather than English pronunciation.

Orthographic Influence in English Loanword Adaptation. One of the most distinctive features of English loanwords in Korean is the phenomenon known as orthography-based pronunciation. In such cases, the Korean representation of a word is influenced more strongly by the English spelling than by the original phonetic form. English orthography is highly irregular and does not always correspond directly to pronunciation. As a result, when English words are borrowed into Korean, their spelling may lead to phonological interpretations that differ from their original pronunciation. For example:

English	Korean
basic	베이직
casino	카지노
close-up	클로즈업

In these examples, the English consonant /s/ is represented by the Korean affricate ㅈ. From a purely phonetic perspective, this substitution is unexpected because Korean already has a corresponding fricative consonant ㅅ.

The reason for this substitution lies in orthographic interpretation. English spelling patterns such as -ic, -ino, and -se often influence the Korean representation of loanwords. As a result, Korean speakers may interpret these sequences as containing an affricate-like sound, leading to the use of ㅈ. This phenomenon

illustrates how orthographic influence can override phonetic similarity during loanword adaptation.

Double Consonants and Orthographic Interpretation. Another example of orthographic influence involves the representation of double consonants. In English orthography, consonant doubling does not necessarily indicate gemination or lengthening. However, when English words are borrowed into Korean, these double consonants are often interpreted as separate segments.

Examples include:

English	Korean
gamma	감마
summer	썸머
comma	콤마
ammonia	암모니아

In these cases, the double consonants in English spelling are reflected in Korean orthography. This results in the appearance of two consonant segments in the Korean form. The Korean phonological system includes genuine consonant length contrasts, particularly between lenis and tense consonants. Consequently, the presence of double consonants in English spelling may encourage Korean speakers to interpret them as representing two phonological segments.

Vowel Adaptation in English Loanwords. Another major aspect of loanword adaptation involves the simplification of English vowels. English possesses a rich vowel system containing numerous monophthongs and diphthongs. Korean, by contrast, has a smaller set of vowel phonemes. Because of these differences, English vowel contrasts are often simplified when words are borrowed into Korean.

For example:

English	Korean
gas	가스

English	Korean
radio	라디오
banana	바나나
oasis	오아시스

In these examples, English vowel distinctions such as /æ/, /ə/, and /ɑ/ are often represented by the Korean vowel ㅏ.

Adaptation of English Diphthongs. English diphthongs are also simplified in Korean loanwords. Because

Korean diphthongs function differently from English ones, they are frequently represented as sequences of monophthongs.

Examples:

English	Korean
radio	라디오
label	라벨
neon	네온

The English diphthong /eɪ/ is typically represented as ㅔ or ㅖ in Korean.

Simplification of Central Vowels. English central vowels such as /ə/ and /ʌ/ do not have direct

equivalents in Korean. As a result, they are usually approximated with the closest Korean vowel.

Examples:

English	Korean
sofa	소파
mustard	머스터드
buffet	부페

This simplification reflects the limitations of the Korean vowel inventory.

DISCUSSION

The analysis presented in this study demonstrates that English loanword adaptation in Korean is influenced by multiple interacting factors. Phonological constraints, orthographic interpretation, and vowel inventory limitations all contribute to shaping the final form of loanwords. Orthography plays a particularly important

role in Korean loanword adaptation. Because English spelling does not always correspond to pronunciation, the written form of a word may lead to unexpected phonological interpretations. At the same time, vowel adaptation reflects the structural differences between English and Korean phonological systems. English vowel contrasts are frequently simplified in Korean due to the smaller size of the Korean vowel inventory.

CONCLUSION

The adaptation of English loanwords in Korean represents a complex interaction between phonological, orthographic, and typological factors. English words entering Korean must conform to the phonological constraints of the Korean language, leading to systematic modifications in pronunciation and spelling.

The study demonstrates that orthographic interpretation often plays a decisive role in determining the final form of loanwords. In many cases, the Korean representation of English words reflects spelling patterns rather than phonetic realization.

Furthermore, the adaptation of English vowels highlights the influence of phonemic inventory limitations in the receiving language. Because Korean has a smaller vowel system than English, vowel contrasts are frequently simplified during the borrowing process. Overall, the findings of this research contribute to a better understanding of how languages integrate foreign lexical material and illustrate the dynamic relationship between phonology, orthography, and language contact.

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