

Prosodic, Symbolic and Foreign Factors in the Adaptation of English Liquids in Korean

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[paper or poster]

This paper explores factors that affect the adaptation of foreign liquids (primarily from English) in Korean. The claim has recently been advanced that perception plays a determinative role when foreign words are borrowed into the recipient language (for Korean, cf. H. Kang 2003 and Y. Kang 2003). Iverson & Lee (2004), in addition, have argued that it is the salient perceptual categories of the recipient language that govern the phonological adaptation of loanwords, not redundant, non-contrastive properties in either the source or the recipient language. The adaptation of liquid sounds into Korean, however, whose lateral and central variants are not phonemically contrastive, would seem to contradict this principle. These sounds alternate according to their position in syllable structure: lateral [l] when filling the coda position, but central tap [ɾ] when occupying the onset (Heo & Lee 2004). Yet English word-medial onset [l] is generally adapted as geminate [ll] rather than parsed as a singleton liquid ([ɾ]), as in *polliseu* ‘police’, not **poriseu*. This sensitivity to the difference between lateral and central liquids is surprising since the feature [lateral] is not distinctive in Korean. Nonetheless, it is not (or need not be) an awareness particularly of the redundant feature [lateral] that comes to the fore in Korean adaptation of foreign liquids; rather, onset liquids in the source language are rendered according to the prosodic syllable structure distinctions of Korean, which are perceptually salient between onset and coda (Ahn & Iverson 2004). That is, medial lateral liquids are always geminate in Korean (shared between coda and onset), whereas the tap liquid is invariably simplex, organized exclusively into the syllable onset; the Korean perception of liquids is then founded not so much on lateral vs. central articulation as it is in terms of coda vs. onset.

Foreign onset laterals are thus structured as coda (hence geminate) liquids in Korean, but in some cases where a geminate lateral is expected the tap arises instead. The data in (1) from Heo & Lee (2004) seem to be adapted so as to avoid a series of geminate liquids in the same word, as there are no native Korean words with multiple geminate liquids. In other cases, unexpected adaptation to a tap is observed even when there are no liquids in series within the word. Oh (2004) suggested that this may be attributable to spelling influence from English, based on her finding that English word-medial laterals are borrowed overwhelmingly as geminates (84% [ll] if from single graphemic ‘l’ in the source vs. 16 % [ɾ], and 99.999% [ll] if from double ‘ll’ vs. 0.001% [ɾ]). But there are factors besides orthography that may account for the unexpected appearance of the tap liquid. Thus, Korean has many loanwords from English which have been borrowed through Japanese rather than directly from English. As Japanese doesn’t allow a coda lateral, but does allow an onset tap, English borrowings in Japanese that are sourced in a word-medial lateral liquid are regularly rendered with an onset ‘r’, which is generally a tap in Japanese and so is realized as such in Korean, too. Some English borrowings via secondary Japanese influence are exemplified in (2). Finally, residual cases suggest a role played by sound symbolism. As the geminate lateral is prosodically heavier than the simplex central tap, the lighter sound may be preferred in words that are used for special purposes, mostly in brand names and proper nouns. Besides the apparent auditory preference, the simplex tap is simpler (and aesthetically more appealing) than the geminate lateral in Korean orthography; these ‘extraphonological’ factors may account for the examples with unexpected taps listed in (3).

- (1) a. Honolluru ‘Honolulu’
 b. solliroki ‘soliloquy’
 c. Marayaram~Mallayaram ‘Malalayam’
- (2) a. sarada ‘salad’
 b. hurasi ‘flash’
 c. sarong ‘salon’
 d. banira ‘vanilla’
 e. ppeurasseu ‘plus’
- (3) a. opureonsseu ‘opulence’
 b. peurena ‘planner’
 c. ripgeurosseu ‘lip gloss’

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