

# Vowel harmony redux: Correct sounds, English loan words, and the sociocultural life of a phonological structure in Korean<sup>1</sup>

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This paper examines an ideology of standard pronunciation and spelling of English loan words in South Korea through the lens of Korean vowel harmony. I focus specifically on the alternation between an older Japanese-style 'a' [a] and a newer Korean-style 'ö' [ɔ] for the mapping of mid-vowels from English to Korean. The opposition between 'a' and 'ö' also figures into the dichotomy of vowel classes between 'yang' or 'light' vowels and 'yin' or 'dark' vowels in Korean vowel harmony. This opposition is pervasive in Korean's rich stock of denotatively iconic words (e.g. onomatopoeia), where ablaut between vowel classes produces semantic and pragmatic contrasts. I suggest that this latter structure of phonological opposition has an influence on speakers' perceptions of vowel difference and associated values in English loan words, despite an overarching ideology of standard pronunciation that is based on assumptions about phonetic fidelity.

이 논문은 영어 차용어의 표준 발음 및 철자법 속 이데올로기를 모음조화를 통해 재조명 하는것이 목적이다. 특히, 영어 중모음이 'ㅏ' [a]나 'ㅓ' [ɔ]로 전사(mapping)되는 점에 초점을 둔다. 그러나 최근 한국에서는 'ㅓ'가 원어 영어 발음과 더 음성학적으로 가깝다고 여겨지며 정음(正音)으로 인식되어지고 있다. 이제 'ㅏ'는 구식말투나 사투리, 아니면 교양없는 언행을 연상시키는 음(音)으로 여겨지고 있다. 그러나, 'ㅏ'/'ㅓ'의 대립은 한국어 모음조화 속의 양성모음과 음성모음의 구분; 즉, 일종의 모음종류의 이분법으로 보아야 한다. 또한, 모음조화는 의성어와 의태어에서 중요한 역할을 한다고 할 수 있다. 그러므로, 모음조화가 표준발음의 이데올로기 속에서 영어 차용어의 모음구분에 영향을 미치는 것이다. [Korean]

**KEYWORDS:** Vowel harmony, loan words, language ideology, denotational iconism, Han'gŭl, Korean

## INTRODUCTION

During 16 months of ethnographic field research on the use and conceptualization of the human voice among Protestant Christians in Seoul

(Harkness 2010),<sup>2</sup> I repeatedly heard South Korea (hereafter Korea) described as a country that had undergone rapid, breathtaking economic and political transformation – from a Japanese colony to an independent nation-state, from military dictatorship to democracy, from a predominantly rural population to a predominantly urban one, from one of the poorest countries in the world to one of the richest. Although such statements have become banal truisms for scholars of South Korea, at the level of everyday discourse these characterizations of Korea's modernization continue to have a powerful effect on the semiotic dimensions of social variation and change. South Koreans across the board reflect explicitly on these changes, construct explicit narratives of these changes, and point out explicitly observable differences in sociocultural life, such as language variation, that count as examples of these changes. A broad aim of my research has been to understand what South Koreans count as a salient semiotic difference, what other forms they draw on to structure perceptions of such difference, how they reflect on and account for such difference, and how these processes feed back into the pragmatics of social and semiotic differentiation. My narrower aim in this paper is to explore the way a difference at the level of a phonological opposition, internal to Korean, influences differentiation in Korean speech and writing at the level of sociolinguistic variation in light of how speakers reflect on both of these forms of difference.

Specifically, this paper explores the intersection of two kinds of linguistic differentiation in a single alternating form. For the mapping of English mid-vowels to English loan words in Korean, the alternation between 'a' [a] and 'ö' [ɔ] represents the difference between an older Japanese pronunciation, now associated with older speakers, provincial dialects, and uneducated speech, and a newer Korean pronunciation, associated with Seoul standard, correctness, and phonetic accuracy.<sup>3</sup> Japanese pronunciations of English loan words were introduced to Korea from the late nineteenth century until the end of the colonial period (1910–1945). Within Korean's residual system of vowel harmony, the same alternation represents the vowel classes of 'yang' or 'light' vowels and 'yin' or 'dark' vowels. This vowel harmonic opposition is pervasive and productive in Korean's rich stock of denotationally iconic words as well as in verbal morphology.<sup>4</sup> My preliminary claim is that this latter structure of phonological opposition influences speakers' perceptions of vowel difference and associated values, despite an ideology of standard pronunciation and spelling that is based on assumptions about phonetic accuracy.

First I discuss the shift from the explicit avoidance of clearly marked Japanese forms to an orientation toward a standard of ascriptively accurate and correct reproductions of English forms. Whereas the de-Japanification of English loan words was organized explicitly in terms of the politics of Korea's opposition to Japan, the newer discourse is organized in terms of an idea of a prototypical modern, cosmopolitan speaker from Seoul. That is, there is a shift from an

explicit opposition (Korea versus Japan) to one of standard and variation. Yet, as Kang, Kenstowicz, and Ito (2008) point out, of all categories of phonological difference among hybrid English loan words that still bear some traces of Japanese phonology, the distinction between the older 'a' and the newer 'ö' for non-epenthetic [ə], [ɜ], and [ʌ] English vowels is at once the most conspicuous difference between older Japanese forms and newer standard forms (2008: 310), as well as the most resistant to change (2008: 307). I suggest that this perceptual difference is related to a phonological opposition based on vowel harmony as a salient opposition from one area of Korean phonology that engages the ideology of a standard language, 'moving in' to emphasize difference as the phonological opposition to Japanese-sounding forms diminishes.

The opposition between 'a' and 'ö' figures into the dichotomy of vowel classes between 'yang' or 'light' vowels and 'yin' or 'dark' vowels in Korean vowel harmony. As I explain below, this dichotomy was first explicitly recorded in the *Correct Sounds for the Instruction of the People* (*Hunmin Chōngūm*), a document from 1443 that introduced Han'gŭl, the native Korean script. And the dichotomy was discussed and theorized in *Explanations and Examples of the Correct Sounds for the Instruction of the People* (*Hunmin Chōngūm Haerye*), a document from 1446 that explained the Neo-Confucian cosmology behind the 1443 document. This phonological dichotomy is preserved and highly productive in Korean's rich stock of denotationally iconic words, which can mutate between light and dark versions of a single word, with effects on both the semantics of the word and the pragmatics of its usage. These changes in semantic and social meaning often operate along an axis of diminution and augmentation. This vowel-harmonic distinction is also at the heart of verbal morphologies that assign a suffix built on 'a' or 'ö' according to whether the root vowel of the verb is light or dark, yang or yin, respectively.

While my claim certainly is not that vowel harmony causes the alternation, I do hypothesize that that speakers' intuitions about the seemingly natural binary between 'a' and 'ö' – the *sprachgefühl* of this relationship – come into play through this widespread and pervasive form of alternation in the mapping of mid-vowels in English loan words to Korean. We might say that loan words preserve this binary as a stark opposition despite the prevailing model of standard and variation. That is, I make the case for seeing a vowel harmonic opposition as playing an important role in linguistic differentiation, especially as the original mark of distinction (Japaneseness) is less and less explicit for speakers. I ask whether vowel harmony and its applications are covertly coloring the way these phonological forms are heard or, as Franz Boas put it, 'apperceived' (1889). My findings suggest that the overarching ideology of standard pronunciation and spelling of English loanwords, based on an assumption of phonetic accuracy, masks the influence of a structure of phonological difference that itself is rich and pervasive in Korean.

## LINGUISTIC MODERNITY AND PHONETIC ACCURACY

**Extract 1:** *a*, *ö*, and linguistic modernity (A = author; B = educated native Korean speaker)

- A: 어제 내 재킷에서 뮤지컬 티켓을 찾았어  
*öje nae chaek'it esö myujik'al t'ik'et ül ch'ajassö*  
 'Yesterday I found the musical ticket in my jacket'
- B: ㅋㅋㅋㅋㅋ  
*k'k'k'k'k'* [laughing]
- B: 뮤지컬 sounds really old  
 'Myujik'al [switching to English]'
- B: 뮤지컬 써야돼  
*Myujik'öl ssöyadwae*  
 '[You] should write myujik'öl'
- B: 할머니 할아버지들은 일본어 스타일 많이 써  
*Halmöni haraböji tül ün ilbonö süt'ail mani ssö*  
 'Grandmothers and grandfathers often use [write in] a Japanese style'

This is an excerpt from a conversation I (A) had via instant messenger in the winter of 2008 with an educated, native Korean speaker (B) approximately 30 years old. In the transcript above, my interlocutor reacted to my transliteration by instructing me to replace 'a' (ㅏ) with 'ö' (ㅓ), according to the presumed norms of contemporary Seoul standard. Mine was not merely a spelling mistake, note, but a mistake of pronunciation, which was clearly reflected in Han'gül, Korean's morphophonemic writing system (see below). To my interlocutor, *myujik'al* sounded 'really old.'

This transcript reveals two frameworks of comparison that Korean speakers use to evaluate variation in the pronunciation and spelling of English loan words. One is a framework aimed at discerning and expunging marked Japanese forms. The other is a framework for discerning and expunging such forms less because they sound Japanese than because they simply sound old – heard in the speech of old people, the people from the provinces, and people with relatively little education. A term like *myujik'al*, for reasons I will discuss shortly, is usually evaluated according to the second framework rather than the first. Bearing only the trace of the old Japanese 'a,' rather than the new Korean 'ö,' it usually just sounds old, i.e., at odds with contemporary, modern, updated Seoul standard. However, some speakers, like the one featured above, do connect the vocalic trace (although not necessarily the word) to a Japanese origin or style.<sup>5</sup>

Some loan words that entered the Korean language through Japan are still highly marked as Japanese. A good example is the English word 'slipper,' which, in its earlier Japanese-inflected form was *ssüreppa*.<sup>6</sup> As a teacher in her mid-30s living in Seoul explained to me, 'Because *ssüreppa* is a completely Japanese-style

pronunciation, it is a mistake' (*Ssüreppa nŭn wanjŏnhi ilbonsik parŭminikka t'ŭllin'gŏya*). The 'completely' in her remark refers to a number of co-occurring phonological features in the word: the fortis fricatives and stops ('ss' and 'pp'); the singleton, rather than geminate, liquid for the English [l] ('r' rather than 'll'); and the assignment of 'a' to the final [ər]. The new standard for this term is now *sŭllip'ŏ* (for full descriptive accounts of English loan-word phonology in Korean, especially in relation to Japanese forms, see Tranter 1997; Tranter 2000; Iverson and Lee 2006; Kang, Kenstowicz and Ito 2008).

Rather than being 'completely' Japanese, however, some words with remnants of Japanese phonology live on in Korean in the form of hybrid loan words, i.e., loan forms that retain some Japanese traits but have lost others. A number of obviously Japanese sounds, such as the epenthetic 'u' or fortis stops and affricates, have been more or less expunged from English loans in Korean. Part of this is due to the concerted efforts made by The National Institute of the Korean Language (*Kungnip kugŏwŏn*) to change the way people in Korea pronounce English loan words by providing guides to 'correct' pronunciation and spelling. Although its stated aim to make Korean language use 'more convenient and more accurate' (*tŏ pyŏllihago tŏ chŏnghwakhage*)<sup>7</sup> – an aim that fits into a more general institutional engagement of standard language policing found elsewhere in the world – a purification effort to rid the Korean language of any traces of Japanese phonology has been a central component of the institute's policy on English loan words.

As the speakers who lived through or directly after the Japanese colonial period increasingly are the only ones whose speech bears such traces, it is no surprise that sounds which once would have been clearly marked as Japanese are now merely marked as old-fashioned. That is, rather than being the indexes of a past colonial power, these sounds increasingly are taken as indexes of their present speakers as demographic stereotypes. But there is a further process. These sounds undergo what Susan Gal has called 'rhematization' (2005: 35n5) in relation to speakers who make them. In the idiom of Charles S. Peirce, Gal's use of *rhematization* refers to the way speakers 'downshift' (Parmentier 1994: 18) their interpretations of semiotic relations, treating indexical relations of contiguity as iconic ones of similarity. The sounds that are indexically linked with older speakers become iconically representative of these speakers, in the sense that, for some interpretant, they become a 'like' one another: both senior citizens and the vowels they emit 'sound old.'

Furthermore, many English loan words in Korean that might be 'mispronounced' according to Japanese phonology may never have been colonial-era loan words at all. They might merely bear the residue of Japanese phonology as a productive structure for pronunciation. For example, one example the of 'ŏ'/'a' alternation I used in conversations with Korean informants was the English word 'churner.' When given the written English form and asked to produce the equivalent Korean form, all speakers (mostly educated speakers between the ages of 20 and 50) produced *ch'ŏnŏ*. When I suggested *ch'ana* as a

possibility, all agreed that it sounded old, vernacular, tacky, or ‘maybe a little Japanese.’ When I asked informants about *myujik’al* versus *myujik’öl*, many were adamant that *myujik’al* was *not* a Japanese loan word, because it lacks the extra epenthetic ‘u’ that is so obviously Japanese, i.e., *myujik’aru*.<sup>8</sup> While some speakers did formulate a link to Japanese phonology, it was the striking sound of oldness of the speech of ‘grandmothers and grandfathers’ (*halmöni wa haraböji*) that they usually expressed first, as in the sequence of my interlocutor’s comments in the first transcript above.

Although many of the original efforts to change the pronunciation and spelling of English loan words in Korean were fueled by the politics of de-Japanification (as was the case with many aspects of sociocultural life in South Korea), the contemporary concern among younger speakers is focused on a language ideology (Silverstein 1979; Schieffelin, Woolard and Kroskrity 1998; Kroskrity 2000) that views a standard for loan word pronunciation as a function of the ‘accuracy’ of Korean in matching the English pronunciation. Just as my interlocutor’s normative directive in Extract 1 – ‘you should write’ (*ssöyadwae*) – invoked an ideology of correctness, many informants were explicit on the matter of a standard and of the relationship of this standard to correct English pronunciation. For example, in a conversation about the status of *myujik’al* in Korean, an educated speaker in his mid 20s put it this way:

표준어라는 것은 다수의 서울지방 사람들이 쓰는 언어를 얘기해요. 왜 표준어로 선택 되었는지는 모르지만 대다수의 사람이 뮤지컬이라는 발음이 영어 발음과 비슷하고 대다수의 사람들이 알아듣기 쉽다고 생각해서 인것 같아요.

‘When we say “standard language,” we are talking about what most people in the Seoul region use. I don’t know why it has been selected as standard language, but it seems that most people think that the pronunciation *myujik’öl* is similar to the English pronunciation and that it is easy to understand.’

As English has emerged as a prestige language, with English loan words operating as indirect indexes of a speaker’s status in a cultural model of modernity and sophistication (Park and Abelman 2004; Lee 2006; Park 2009), the emphasis on ‘good’ or ‘correct’ English has become paramount (Park 2010). The emergence of English as a sign of modernity and sophistication fits within a larger narrative of ethnonational advancement that describes a break with past suffering and shame and focuses on assuming a powerful leadership role in the world. The contemporary ideology of a standard as correct is linked with stereotypes of the speaker who uses that form. That is, the ideology rests on the relations among indexical orders (Silverstein 2003), a concept which links the micro-contextual to the macro-contextual of sociolinguistic phenomena by relating indexical strata one to another. For example, Korean speakers systematically differentiate sentence endings and lexical items according to particular speech levels as deference and demeanor indexicals (i.e. ‘politeness’ or ‘respect’). These grammatical and lexical contrasts pertaining to the speech

event are linked to a first indexical order of the particular roles, often asymmetric, to which speakers are recruited over the course of a speech event. These speaker roles are related dialectically to a second indexical order, in which such role differentiation has the effect of generalizing role relations as inhabitable identities positioned within a social landscape. This second-order inherently cultural view of a social landscape thus prescribes the general 'rules' of appropriateness-of-use and effectiveness-in-use for the first indexical order.

It is precisely these higher-order identities that are invoked in the use of and commentary on so-called correct pronunciations of English loan words. Via rhematization, ideologically framed qualities of higher-order indexical descriptions of social identity (e.g. grandmothers and grandfathers) are projected onto local descriptions of linguistic form, so that the qualities associated with speech styles become the qualities associated with categories of personhood and vice versa. This is highly salient in the performance of, or self-distancing from, certain identifiable roles through speech, where 'speaking like' someone or something becomes 'being like' someone or something. It is important to note, however, that although the variability of a single feature might well serve as a kind of stylistic shibboleth – a highly marked indexical sign – of social identity, variability of a single feature itself does not constitute style. Rather, as Ervin-Tripp (1972), Irvine (1990), Agha (2007: 185–188), and others have pointed out, particular variations are linked to other co-occurring forms as a more generally identifiable pattern, which then is further linked to stereotypic indexical values at play in communication. However, a single alternating sign *can* point to such more complex registers and their stereotypic speakers (such as r-less English in a New York City department store in Labov 1966b).

The role of stereotypic indexical values concerns what third-wave sociolinguistic variationist approaches refer to as 'style.' That is, newer sociolinguistic approaches have taken note of the role of culture in language variation and change and aim to reveal an 'orderly heterogeneity in the ever-changing indexical value of variables' (Eckert 2008: 464) through an analysis of persona style. The third wave now aims to build on the first two generations of variationist research (which focused more on the fixedness and directness of indexical relation between variables in speech and speaker categories) by viewing the way style – presented as an equivalent of what Asif Agha (2007) has called 'enregisterment' (Eckert 2008: 456) – can serve in the performance of typifiable personae in particular institutional contexts. Supported by the linked concepts of language ideology and indexical orders, there is an increasing concern with speakers' ideological reflection on the relation between linguistic variables and social categories – such as old-sounding variables and old people. The desire to avoid certain semiotic forms at the first indexical order of discursive interaction is based on a presupposed second indexical order concerning the relationship between social position and linguistic standard. And, accordingly, younger speakers in Korea appear to be less and less concerned that they might be mistaken for a Japanese colonial subject than for a person from the provinces



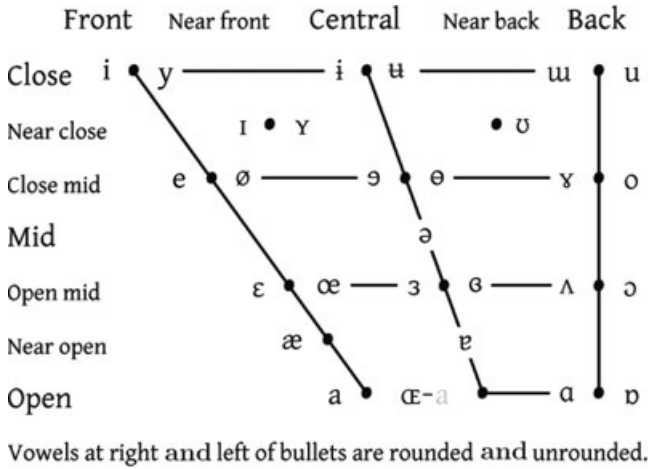
Figure 1: The proper pronunciation of ‘hamburger’ (image reproduced from an exhibit at the National Museum of Korea)

or an uneducated person who sounds like the stereotypical old person who uses the normatively ‘wrong’ form. At the same time, many speakers admitted in interviews to using the old-fashioned Japanese and hybrid styles playfully as a form of covert, in-group prestige in intimate situations with friends and family. Unfortunately I do not have any recorded instances of this phenomenon.

This explicit concern with correctness of pronunciation is emphasized in official celebrations of Han’gŭl, Korea’s indigenous morpho-phonemic script (see next section for a brief history of its invention and dissemination). In Korea’s national script ideology (King 2007), Han’gŭl is often exalted as a kind of perfect system for incorporating loan words into the Korean language.<sup>9</sup> This emphasis on the adaptability of Han’gŭl (rather than on the structure of Korean phonology, on which Han’gŭl was built) was made clear in a video exhibit at The National Museum of Korea (*Kungnip pangmulgwŏn*) on the invention and use of Han’gŭl, which I observed in Seoul in 2006. The exhibit touted the Korean script as being better than its Chinese and Japanese neighbors at absorbing and representing foreign pronunciations accurately (Figure 1). Introducing the comparison, the narrator of the video announces: ‘If you try to compare the script of different languages for English pronunciation, you can recognize the exactitude of Han’gŭl’s phonetic inscription.’<sup>10</sup>

The nature of the comparison as presented in Figure 1 is telling in many ways, not merely for the incorrect transcription and Korean transliteration of the Japanese, which should read ‘[hanba-ga-]’ and ‘한바가’ (or, for spoken Japanese, [hamba-ga-] and ‘함바가,’ due to assimilation).<sup>11</sup> It presents the Korean spelling as reproducing the English pronunciation exactly, even though there is no North American [r] in the Korean spelling (*haembŏgŏ*). Furthermore, through the bracketed Han’gŭl transliterations, Han’gŭl, like the IPA, is presented as capable of accounting for the pronunciation of foreign words (Chinese and Japanese), but foreign scripts are not given the same status. For loan words, the writing system is not presented as morpho-phonemic (as with native Korean or Sino-Korean words), but rather as phonetic (*parŭmp’yogi*, literally ‘pronunciation inscription’). This obscures the historical debates over whether Han’gŭl should





**Figure 2:** Abstracted vowel space (International Phonetic Alphabet)

be applied phonemically or morpho-phonemically, or written in syllabic blocks or individual letters (see Kim-Renaud 1976).

Furthermore, the word used here, ‘hamburger,’ and its accompanying image are not merely tokens of the English language, but serve as emblems of global communication and modern consumer culture. To belong to the modern world, a speaker must be able to pronounce ‘hamburger’ correctly. The communicative currency for participation in linguistic modernity is understood to be an authentic-sounding pronunciation of words like ‘hamburger.’

Many discussions of the switch from Japanese spelling and pronunciation to Korean spelling and pronunciation are cast in precisely this idiom of phonetic accuracy.<sup>12</sup> The notion that Korean-style pronunciation provides a closer phonetic match for English may be warranted in some areas, such as the less restrictive syllable structure of Korean (Kang, Kenstowicz and Ito 2008: 303). But the argument for why the ‘ö’ sound in Korean (often transcribed as [ɔ] or even [ʌ]) is better than ‘a’ in replicating North American English mid-vowels is based on the abstraction of the IPA vowel chart and its spatially mapped dimensions of distance and proximity between prototypical vowels (Figure 2). In this chart, the distance from one vowel to another is calculated in terms of intermediary nodes consisting of prototypical vowels constituted as a phonetic bundle combining the features of relative openness (or height), backness, and rounding. According to this chart, the Korean ‘ö’ ([ɔ] or [ʌ]) should be nearly identical to an English [ʌ] (e.g. ‘bus’) and a much better fit than ‘a’ [a] for other English mid-vowels.

However, in the global communicative space where the word ‘hamburger’ is uttered, this argument does not reflect the ethnographic facts. What is normally written as [ɔ] or [ʌ] for the Korean ‘ö’ are absolutely and unequivocally *not*

exact matches for the North American English [ʌ] and not necessarily great approximations for the English [ɜ] or [ə] either. For North American English speakers, these vowels uttered in loan words in Korean still sound quite different from their own speech and thus are still highly marked – even if they are considered ‘closer’ or even ‘the same’ in terms of an abstracted vowel space.

I discussed the issue with college-aged native speakers of English at a North American university (precisely the authoritative pronouncers of the word, ‘hamburger’), and they consistently reported that the Korean pronunciations of the words *myujik'al* and *myujik'öl* sounded *equally unlike* the [ə] in their own pronunciations of the word ‘musical.’ For these students, *myujk'al* and *myujik'öl* sounded equally foreign, with neither type sounding ‘closer’ to the English pronunciation they were used to hearing. But this problem, particularly as it pertains to the ‘ö’ vowel, has been accounted for in Korean as well.<sup>13</sup> Kim Chöng-su (2005[1990]: 62–63) writes, ‘for most foreigners, ㅜ [ö] sounds similar to ㅓ [o], ㅓ can be rendered as o, and ㅜ with eo or ö, but when one considers that this has no effect on their ability to actually distinguish them in actual practice these cannot be considered satisfactory renderings.’ To North American English speakers (myself included when I first began learning Korean), *myujik'öl* might as well be *myujikol*.

As Kang, Kenstowicz, and Ito (2008) point out, however, ‘a’ and ‘ö’ are perceived by native Korean speakers to be extremely different. It is no surprise, then, that one of the most pervasive and pronounced distinctions between Japanese-style and Korean-style loan words is precisely the contrast between ‘a’ (ㅏ) and ‘ö’ (ㅜ), the latter of which is imagined to somehow be a ‘closer’ match to English mid-vowels. See, for example, the regularity of this distinction in Table 1.

Despite this perception of difference, Kang, Kenstowicz, and Ito (2008: 312–313) also suggest that Korean speakers are often unsure about the appropriate mapping of ‘ö’ from English vowels.<sup>14</sup> In some cases, they report, ‘ö’ may even be overapplied as a form of hypercorrection based on what Labov (1972) called ‘linguistic insecurity.’<sup>15</sup> On the one hand, ‘a’ is residual of Japanese phonology,

**Table 1:** English loan words in Japanese and Korean compared (adapted from Tranter 1997: 141–142)

IPA	English	Japanese	Korean (MR)	Korean (Han'gül)
/ʌ/	bus	basu	pösü	버스
/ɜ/	service	sābisu	söbisü	서비스
/iə/	earring	iyaringu	iöring	이어링
/ʊə/	manicure	manikyua	maenik'yuö	매니큐어
/ɛə/	hair	hea	heö	헤어
/ɔə/	door	doa	toö	도어
/aʊə/	shower	shawā	syawö	샤워

but not always clearly marked as Japanese. On the other, 'ö' is viewed as an accurate mapping of English mid-vowels, and thus as the basis of a standard national pronunciation. Although cast in an idiom of standard, the difference between 'a' and 'ö' is accounted for as a difference that is important to Koreans: between old and new, between periphery and center, between low and high. So although the initial framework is articulated as *the* standard and *a* variation, in fact, the difference between 'ö' and 'a' actually lives on as the difference between *the* standard and *the* variation, i.e., the 'ö'/'a' difference is not merely a variation but an opposition; the vowels are fundamentally opposed within a rubric of 'correctness.'

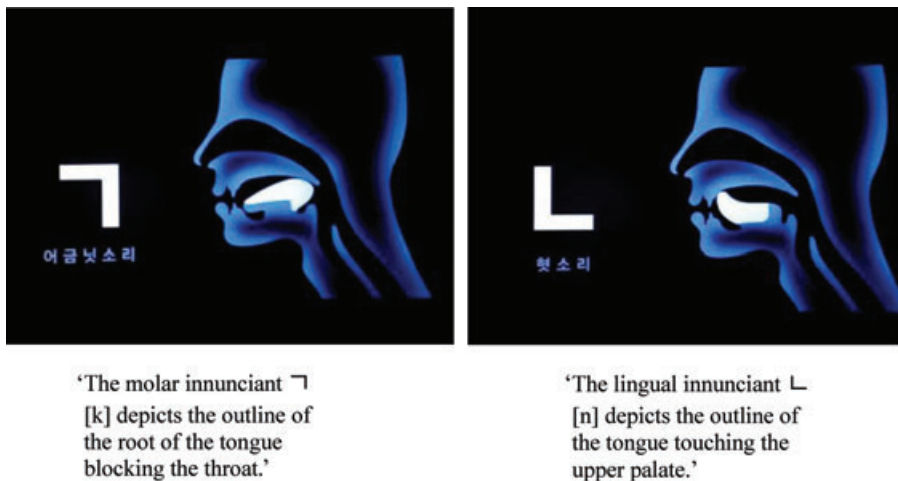
Despite the ideology of standard and variation, a more contained form of differentiation seems to be at work here; the extreme nature of this differentiation for a particular alternating form appears to be linked to a binary system of vowel oppositions internal to Korean itself. I am speaking of vowel harmony in Korean as a phonological structure that might covertly shape the associations speakers have with the different vowels. And, importantly, vowel harmony, since it was first accounted for by Korean speakers and regimented through the invention of Han'gŭl, has been tied to statements regarding the correctness of sounds in relation to the perfectness of the script. It is to this that I now turn.

### HAN'GŪL, VOWEL HARMONY, AND DENOTATIONAL ICONISM

Han'gŭl was disseminated originally through two documents authored by King Sejong (r. 1418–1450), the fourth king of the Chosŏn Dynasty (1392–1910), and his scholars: the 1443 document *Hunmin Chŏngŭm* ('*The Correct Sounds for the Instruction of the People*,' Abbr. HC), and the 1446 document *Hunmin Chŏngŭm Haerye* ('*Explanations and Examples of the Correct Sounds for the Instruction of the People*,' Abbr. HCH).<sup>16</sup> With the creation of Han'gŭl, its original dissemination, and its further explication, the phonology of Korean was given a representational writing system that could account 'correctly' for the vernacular speech of Koreans unschooled in Chinese.<sup>17</sup>

Han'gŭl is composed of letters (*chamo*) organized into syllabic blocks. The letters for consonants were designed as iconic representations of the phonetic articulations that Sejong understood to be taking place along the vocal tract (Figure 3).<sup>18</sup> However, the letters for vowels, while given articulatory phonetic descriptions, were supposed to represent iconically a phonological understanding of sound contrasts organized and explained in terms of Neo-Confucian cosmology.

Historical linguists have suggested that Middle Korean contained a rich and rigid system of vowel harmony, which governed the pronunciation of native Korean words (Kim-Renaud 1976; Ledyard 1998[1965]; Lee and Ramsey 2011).<sup>19</sup> However, the earliest known records mentioning this contrast are the very documents that introduced Sejong's graphological invention. And as a translator of the documents into English points out, the HCH 'reads less like



**Figure 3:** Iconic representation of phonetic articulations of consonants (captions from HCH 1.2.1, as cited in Ledyard 1998[1965]: 244; images reproduced from an exhibit at the National Museum of Korea)

an essay on writing than a neo-Confucian tract' (Ledyard 1998[1965]: 196). Sejong labeled one set of vowels 'yang' (양 / *yang* / 陽) and another 'yin' (음 / *ŭm* / 陰), explaining that '[In] human phonology, there is the Pattern of Yin and Yang; it is just that [until now] no one has looked into it' (HCH 1.1.0, cited in Ledyard 1998[1965]: 282). And it is from this philosophical position that Sejong designed the shape of the corresponding letters and thereby 'engraphed' Korean vowel harmony (Example 1).<sup>20</sup>

**Example 1:** Cosmological conceptualization of vowel harmony (HCH 1.3.4, cited in Ledyard 1998[1965]: 249)

In ⊥ [o], ⊃ [a], ㄴ [yo], ㅈ [ya], the round is situated above and on the outside; this is because, emerging from Heaven, they are Yang.

In ⊏ [u], ⊂ [e], ㅍ [yu], ㅊ [ye], the round is situated below and on the inside; this is because, emerging from Earth, they are Yin.

The well-known complementary distinction of yin and yang extends to a number of binary structures of attribution, e.g. female-male, earth-heaven, negative-positive, etc. If the mainstream theory of Middle Korean phonology is correct, then Sejong and his scholars probably attributed a phonological structure to what they heard and theorized as a more fundamental, essential binary distinction pertaining to the perceived qualities of different vowels. I again want to use the concept of indexical order here, not to link specific speech forms to higher-order, generalized categories in a culturally presupposed social universe, but rather to link speech forms to higher-order, generalized properties in a culturally presupposed Neo-Confucian universe of complementary essences

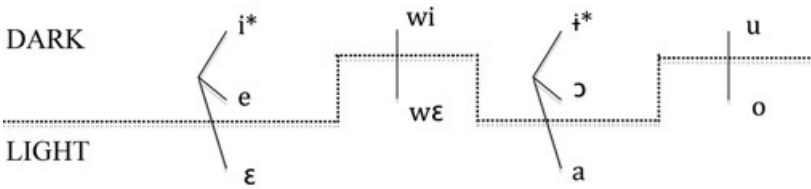
(which also apply to social categories). That is, these various alternating vowel forms are related indexically to a first-order binary structure of sonic attribution (now often called 'dark' and 'light;' see below), which is related to a second indexical order structured by the abstract qualities of yin and yang.

From the moment the structure of Korean vowel harmony was first recorded and explained in the HCH, it was conceptualized within an explicit language ideology. However, this ideology was practically buried until the 20th century. Sejong's 1443 dissemination of Han'gŭl (HC), which was basically a practical guide for the new writing system, was copied into the annals and translated into Korean. But the 1446 explanation of this new system (HCH), which outlined the Neo-Confucian cosmology behind the graphological invention, disappeared from circulation, only to resurface in 1940 (Ledyard 1998[1965]: 161ff). And although various groups used Han'gŭl throughout the Chosŏn dynasty (1392–1910) for various purposes, it was considered 'vulgar' or 'vernacular' writing (*ŏnmun*) by the Neo-Confucian linguistic authorities, i.e., the opposite of the 'true' writing (*chinmun*) of classical Chinese. Classical Chinese (*hanmun*) constituted the vast majority of official written documents during this period. Only after Han'gŭl was revived as a 'national' script in the late 19th century and characterized as a 'scientific' writing system in the early 20th century (King 1998) could the newly discovered HCH, with its Neo-Confucian framing of Korean phonology, later serve as a post-liberation national emblem of linguistic scientificity and eventually be taught in schools (Ross King, personal communication, 5 June 2011). Even without its explicit ideological framing, however, the binary phonological structure of sounds perdured in both the lexicon and verb morphologies.

Today, the vowels [a], [o], and [ɛ] are yang, and the vowels [ɔ] (also sometimes written as [ʌ] or even [ə]), [u], and [e] are yin.<sup>21</sup> In verbal morphology [i] and [ɨ] (also sometimes written as [ui]) are also yin. In denotational iconism, [i] and [ɨ] can be yin or neutral (Sohn 1999: 181–185). In denotational iconism, [i] and [ɨ] are yin in initial syllables and neutral in non-initial syllables. Kim-Renaud (1976: 403) accounts for this variability by pointing to the historic vowel shift in Korean, during which the phonological system lost a vowel that was graphologically accounted for in the HC and the HCH, the 'arae a.' This vowel was written with a dot (·) and is thought to have sounded something like [ʌ] (Kim-Renaud 1976) or [o] (Kim-Renaud 2008). In Middle Korean, (·) represented heaven and thus formed the yang/light vowel-harmonic counterpart to the yin/dark (—), representing earth. Because this paper is not centrally concerned with the history of the vowels themselves, but rather with their ideological differentiation and essentialization, I have not included a discussion of the Middle Korean vowel system, which is still up for some debate. Interested readers should consult Lee and Ramsey's (2011) welcome new history of the Korean language (especially pages 100–240).

See Figure 4 below for a chart with the vowels represented in Han'gŭl, McCune-Reischauer (MR) Romanization, and IPA symbols, respectively, and

	Han'gŭl	MR	IPA
<b>Light</b>	ㅏ	a	[a]
	ㅓ	o	[o]
	ㅗ	ae	[ɛ]
	ㅜ	oe	[wɛ]
<b>Dark</b>	ㅓ	ǒ	[ɔ] ([ʌ])
	ㅕ	u	[u]
	ㅛ	e	[e]
	ㅠ	wi	[wi]
<b>Neutral/Dark</b>	ㅣ	i	[i]
	ㅡ	ũ	[i], ([u])



\*Dark or neutral  
(adapted from Kim-Renaud 1976)

Figure 4: Modern Korean vowel harmony

a diagram of the phonological structure of these vowel-harmonic oppositions in modern Korean.<sup>22</sup>

In verbal morphologies, the ‘a’/‘ǒ’ contrast in particular is the only vocalic set in the contrastive verb-ending morphologies that have vowel-harmonic correspondence to the larger classes of yin and yang vowels in the verb root. For example, *ssol-ta* (‘to gnaw’) becomes *ssora* (‘it gnaws’), whereas *ssŭl-ta* (‘to sweep’) becomes *ssŭrǒ* (‘it sweeps’).

Residual vowel harmony in modern Korean is most visible and productive in the rich system of denotational iconism (i.e. onomatopoeia [*ũisŏngǒ*] and other so-called ‘mimetics’ [*ũit’aeǒ*]). Korean contains thousands of denotationally iconic words that follow vowel harmony in their construction (generally formed using either all yang vowels or all yin vowels), many of which are capable of accommodating vowel play between fixed sets of yang or yin vowels (Martin

1962; Lee 1992). So powerful for speakers is the feeling of the yang/yin distinction that the vowels themselves have been given visual and physical metaphors of sonic quality: while many scholars still often use the categories of yang and yin to describe vowel harmony, others use the categories of light (or bright) and dark (or heavy). The light/dark vocalic ablaut is expressed indexically, frequently, but not universally, in the pairing of diminutive and augmentative forms of a lexeme, respectively.<sup>23</sup> (This ablaut can also intersect with three-way consonant mutation among lenis, fortis, and aspirated versions, which can connote a change in intensity, speed, size, etc.)

In some cases the semantic contrast is fixed by convention; in many others, vowel alternations are based on the particular speech event and its metapragmatic (Silverstein 1976; Silverstein 1993) framing. For example, the described activity of inanimate entities in the world can undergo augmentation or diminution in a fairly straightforward matter.

**Example 2:** Denotational iconism and descriptions of inanimate objects (Lee 1992: 102)

*pōlŭttōk* 'sudden gesture of . . . larger objects'

*pallttak* 'sudden gesture of . . . smaller objects'

However, the particular valuation of augmentation or diminution always exists in relation to the entity being described: the diminutive can be 'petite' or 'dinky'; the augmentative can be 'ample' or 'bulky, clumsy' (Martin 1962: 184; Lee 1992: 105). This is especially important to keep in mind when predicating actions or properties of persons.

Korean's explicitly marked grammatical and lexical forms of deference and honorification (Sohn 1999; Lee and Ramsey 2000) have been especially compatible with the requirements for the verbally mediated performance of and recruitment to social position within a residual Neo-Confucian stratification structure of kinship, gender, age, and other institutional relations. In Korean speech, these speech levels signal one's position in relation to both interlocutors and objects of reference and predication. For example, in Example 3 below, when the narrator of a children's book describes little Minju's grandmother awakening suddenly in the night, she writes (using the same adverb as in Example 2 above):

**Example 3:** Denotational iconism and descriptions of people (adapted from Kim 2002: 32)

그런데 할머니가 갑자기 벌떡 일어섰습니다.

*Kūrōnde halmōni ka kapchagi*<sub>1</sub> *pōlŭttōk*<sub>2</sub> *irōsōss-sūmnida*.

'But grandmother suddenly<sub>1</sub> suddenly<sub>2</sub> rose to her feet.'

1. Without warning, unexpectedly: describes the event

2. Sudden movement of getting up: describes the action

Although the grandmother is not a large object (indeed, in the illustration of the children's book in Figure 5, she, like Minju, is quite small), she



Figure 5: Book illustration of Minju and her grandmother (Kim 2002: 42–43)

occupies a role of seniority. The vowel play involved in denotationally iconic words that describe human actions or speech lines up fairly regularly with honorific speech and speech levels. For instance, in Example 4 notice how the ‘ö/’a’ vowel-harmonic alignments of ‘smilingly’ (*pönggŭl-pönggŭl/panggŭl-panggŭl*) are also aligned with the honorific markers. The grandfather is described with the dark form of the adverb and also receives an honorific nominative particle and an honorific verb suffix; the baby is described with the light form of the adverb and receives a plain particle and no honorific verb suffix.

**Example 4:** Denotational iconism and honorification (adapted from Lee and Ramsey 2000: 122)

할아버지께서<sub>1</sub> 병글병글 웃으신<sub>2</sub>다  
*Haraböji kkesö<sub>1</sub> pönggŭl-pönggŭl usösin<sub>2</sub>da*  
 ‘Grandfather laughs smilingly.’

1. Honorific nominative particle; 2. Honorific verb suffix.

아기가<sub>3</sub> 방글방글 웃는다.  
*Agi ka<sub>3</sub> panggŭl-panggŭl utnŭnda*  
 ‘The baby laughs smilingly.’

3. Plain nominative particle.

The system of relative motivation in denotational iconism emerged (we suspect) from the vowel-harmonic rules of Middle Korean and was described explicitly by King Sejong. However, the analogical relations were not all fixed. As we saw above, the sonic contrast can be linked up with a higher-order ideological framework that organizes the yang/yin alternation in terms of an honorific register. Even though neither the framework of linguistically coded deference and demeanor indexicals nor the use of vowel harmony in denotational iconism were outlined in the HCH of 1446, both have been compatible with the



theory explained in the original document, since both relate to the Neo-Confucian emphasis on cosmological order and ideal social relations.

Yang/yin vowel play can even be applied to native Korean color terms, deictics, and other fixed phrases. For example, the adjective 'to be red,' *ppalga-ta*, can become *ppölgö-ta*, suggesting more saturation (yang to yin). The medial deictic 'that' in the phrase 'that guy' *kũ nom* can become *ko nom*, having a degrading, pejorative effect (yin to yang). Among younger speakers, the informal greeting *anyöng* (literally 'peace') can become *anyong* or even *anyang*, along with nasalization (yin to yang), giving an effect of cuteness and self-diminution (often belonging to a gendered register of cuteness called *aegyo*). Vowel ablaut structured by vowel harmony can also occur on verb-final yang vowels. For example, the final 'a' in *maja* ('correct,' intimate speech level) or in the formal sentence ending *-mnida*, can be changed to 'ö.' In words such as *kürigo* ('and'), related verb-ending conjunctions such as VERB-*ko* ('VERB-and'), and fixed phrases such as *aigo* ('alas'), the final 'o,' a yang vowel, can be switched to 'u,' its vowel harmonic yin counterpart (cf. Hong 1991). More research is certainly needed to determine the social indexicality and language ideology involved in these forms of vowel play.

Suffice it to say that this binary structure of attribution is pervasive and productive in Korean. The 'a'/'ö' distinction, which is central to verb morphologies and widespread in other alternating forms, stands as a kind of emblem of the larger binary structure of vowel classes. That is, the particular alternating set is both indexical of the larger structure, and also serves as an icon of the broader, culturally conceptualized yang/yin basis of the dichotomy. The alternation between 'a' and 'ö' in English loan words appears to invoke this rich Korean system of *sprachgefühl* (Sohn 1999: 96) that pertains to fundamental oppositions and their associated values. Absent an explicit linkage to, and thus opposition to, a Japanese origin for Korean speakers, the system of formal oppositions from another area of Korean phonology seems to have 'leaked' into the pronunciation and perception of loan words (see Harkness 2011 for a different example of this kind of phenomenon), contributing to the way the 'a'/'ö' distinction is perceived not merely as a variation but as the variation – the alternation – between old and new, between tacky and modern, between provincial and cosmopolitan. We might say that the 'a'/'ö' distinction is operating covertly as a link between two forms of linguistic differentiation, with the longstanding, more pervasive one 'coloring' the more recent, more restricted one.

## CONCLUSION

During the final years of Japanese colonial rule, the Korean language and writing system were placed under severe restrictions in schools and businesses. Whereas Japanese formally was a dominant language, these days younger Korean speakers describe English loans that used 'a' instead of 'ö' for mid-vowels

as cute, quaint, or tacky, but also inaccurate, unscientific, and in some ways dumb. They sometimes extended these attributes to the Japanese language itself. In an interesting reversal, the phonological indexes of the aggression, military power, and economic superiority of Japan during the colonial period have been transformed into the cute or tacky speech of old people or inhabitants of the provinces.

In closing, I suggest that the vowel-harmony-based, yang/yin, light/dark contrast, which in denotational iconism so often signals diminution and augmentation, are involved in the valuation of the 'a'/'ö' alternation between older and newer forms of loan word pronunciation. In the system of denotational iconism, the vocalic contrast alters predication in relation to the speaker. In the new system of transliteration and pronunciation, the vocalic contrast characterizes the speaker in relation to other speakers: the binary structure of attribution here is adopted to situate the speakers either prior to or contemporaneous with Korea's post-liberation modernization. But more than sounding explicitly Japanese, the alternation from 'ö' to 'a' is heard as a deviation from contemporary Seoul standard. And in this evaluative mode, these descriptions take on a character of diminution, of lowering, that is clearly and powerfully contrasted with the proper, correct, accurate, cosmopolitan, modern speech of contemporary Seoulites. The yang/yin binary structure of attribution is being applied here in a seemingly qualitatively distinct semiotic mode of linguistic differentiation as a form of what Irvine and Gal call 'fractal recursion,' which 'involve[s] the projection of an opposition, salient at one level of relationship onto some other level.'<sup>24</sup> The properties of diminution and augmentation established at the intersection of vowel harmony and denotational iconism appear to have been remapped onto an ethnonational narrative of language change.

When asked to provide examples of the old and new pronunciations, most speakers offered words that demonstrated the 'a'/'ö' contrast, as in Table 1. However, they did not make explicit generalizing commentary on the pervasiveness of the particular 'a'/'ö' vocalic opposition as such in the contrasting forms, even though it is a widespread structural contrast in their own speech. That is, they were clearly aware of the contrast in the sense that they could identify standard and non-standard versions and could even produce the different versions upon elicitation, but they could not always describe the precise nature of the contrast in terms of segmentable vowels. Although some would point out the contrast in discussions of particular words, few remarked on the regularity of the 'a'/'ö' transformation itself across all relevant loan words. If they did hear the difference as a structured, segmentable vocalic opposition (rather than a more general instance of 'style'), none of them readily made the connection to the vowel-harmonic system in which this opposition plays a central role. Some, however, usually those who had studied the Korean language in an academic setting, were able to recognize the structural analogical relation to vowel harmony upon my suggestion. But most, when explaining why the

new pronunciation was better than the old one, did not talk about Korean phonology. Instead they referred to the way Han'gŭl was a very 'scientific' or 'accurate' writing system that could account for English pronunciation, or they merely pointed to the educated speech of younger speakers in Seoul as the standard.

The vowel-harmony-influenced binary structure of attribution seems to allow this particular phonological distinction to be highlighted and emphasized in words – to be heard not merely as a variation, but as an opposition – even if speakers don't immediately isolate it as a regular and widespread segmentable contrast or recognize it as being akin to phonological oppositions in other areas of their speech. That is, their attention is focused mostly on the more general pronunciation of words or the higher-order indexical values of the opposition (see Labov 1994: 344 on social attention and surface structure; see Silverstein 2001[1981] on continuous segmentability and metapragmatic awareness). The fact that the Korean 'ö', rather than 'a', seems to speakers to allow for a pronunciation closer to the American English schwa hooks neatly both into an ideology of the correctness and accuracy of Korean speech and writing, as well as into an existent, pervasive, and intuitively felt binary system of oppositions. This double linkage makes it a powerful emblem of linguistic differentiation. Furthermore, the diminutive/augmentative contrasts that are linked to this opposition in denotational iconism seem to play a role in how younger speakers not merely differentiate and temporalize but also infantilize as quaint or tacky the pronunciations of the older generation and Japanese speakers as compared to their own scientifically authorized, cosmopolitan standard. In this model of linguistic modernity, the speech of seniors becomes infantile, and the speech of young people becomes mature.

What is not immediately expressed in these conversations, however, is the fact that the ideological loading of Han'gŭl (and by extension, Korean phonology, which Han'gŭl was created to reflect) as a graphic prescription for the 'correct sounds for the instruction of the people' and the ideological loading of vowel-harmonic oppositions according the culturally specific notion that '[In] human phonology, there is the pattern of yin and yang' have long been intimately – and productively – linked.

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## NOTES

1. A shorter version of this paper was presented on May 9, 2009 at the University of Michigan. A full-length version was awarded the 2010 Society for Linguistic Anthropology Annual Essay Prize. This paper has benefited from the helpful comments of Chris Ball, Elaine Chun, Jenna Kim, Juwŏn Kim, Ross King, Gari Ledyard, Adrienne Lo, Robin Queen, S. Robert Ramsey, and two anonymous reviewers. Yaejin Cho was immensely helpful with the Korean abstract. Figure 5 is reproduced with the permission of the publisher. All errors are my own.

2. I carried out research in 2005, 2006, 2008–9, and 2010, focusing primarily on Seoul's Christian churches and colleges of music. My informants were generally educated speakers between the ages of 20 and 50. I also conducted interviews and gathered data among many non-Christians, musicians of traditional music, non-musicians, residents of the neighborhood of Mokdong, taxi drivers throughout Seoul, etc. Data for this paper were gathered through both formally structured interviews and informal conversations.
3. This alternation is reflected in written Korean (in Han'gŭl) as 'ㅏ'(a) versus 'ㅑ'(ö). I use the McCune-Reischauer Romanization symbols, rather than the IPA symbols, to emphasize the point that the phonetic abstractions do not accurately account for the phonologically organized acoustic and perceptual differences between Korean and U.S. English versions of the 'same' vowel.
4. Following Silverstein (1994), I use the term 'denotationally iconic' to describe words that are elsewhere called 'sound symbolic' (see Jakobson and Waugh 2002[1979]: 181–234). This terminological approach preserves Charles Peirce's account of different sign functions (see Peirce 1998: passim). A symbol is that which is taken by an interpretant to stand for its object by convention, the index to stand for its object by contiguity or proximity, the icon to stand for its object by formal resemblance or similarity. Insofar as 'sound symbolic words,' 'mimetics,' 'onomatopoeia,' etc. are taken by speakers to denote their objects by virtue of sounding like their denotata (whether sounds, entities, actions, or states), they are denotationally iconic.
5. It is important to point out that these frameworks often bleed into one another. For instance, during ethnographic fieldwork in Seoul from 2008 to 2009, I observed an English repertoire and diction course at a prominent school of vocal music in Seoul. One oft-repeated criticism made by the instructor, a native Korean speaker who had spent many years studying and performing in the United States, was that the students were using what she called 'colonial' Korean pronunciations of English words. This did not refer to Japanese phonology as such, but to the pronunciation of English loan words that sounded 'too Korean.' One example was the contracted word 'Ev'ry' from the phrase 'Ev'ry valley shall be exalted,' featured in a tenor solo in Handel's *Messiah*. The instructor reprimanded a number of students who pronounced the word as *eböri*. Although she called it 'colonial' pronunciation, the instructor actually was pointing to the way Korean phonology negatively affected the students' phonetic approximations of English words, making the singers sound unnatural, uneducated, unsophisticated, and unc cosmopolitan from the point of view of a judge at an international audition or competition. The instructor's point was that the students were too comfortable with their markedly Korean pronunciations of English words – pronunciations that they took to be accurate approximations of the English.
6. I am grateful to Hisun Kim for alerting me to the change in pronunciation and spelling of this term.
7. [http://www.korean.go.kr/09\\_new/about/greeting.jsp](http://www.korean.go.kr/09_new/about/greeting.jsp) (last accessed October 1, 2011)
8. Korean informants often accounted for this using the word *patch'im*, which refers to consonant or consonant cluster at the end of Korean syllables.
9. For example, see Kim (2005[1990]: 50): 'While it is clear that hangeul was designed with extremely powerful transcription capabilities so as to be able to record the sounds of other languages surrounding Korean, too, it is nonetheless obvious that its central purpose was to write Korean.' In recent years, the Hunminjŏngŭm

Research Institute in Korea has been training speakers of Cia-Cia, in the city of Bau-Bau on Buton Island, Indonesia, to use Han'gŭl to transcribe their spoken language.

10. 영어 발음의 표기를 다른 외국어와 비교해 보면 한글 발음표기의 정확성을 알 수 있다.
11. I am grateful to Serena Zhao for pointing out this error.
12. See, for example, the account given in Kang, Kenstowicz, and Ito (2008), which poses the difference between 'Japanese style' and 'English style' loan words in Korean, rather than between 'Japanese Style' and 'Korean Style.'
13. See Umeda (1999) for a discussion of the generational variation of pronunciation of the (ㅏ) vowel in Seoul Korean.
14. Note the difficulty that arises with English words that contain two different mid-vowels. For example, the title of the 2009 Korean film 'Mother' (/mʌðər/) was released in Korea as the English loan word *madō* (마더). Had the title been spelled *mōdō* (머더), Korean speakers would have read 'murder.' The film did, in fact, have to do with a murder.
15. The linguistic productivity of the dialectic between first and second indexical orders is central to Robert Menner's (1937: 178) observation on what he termed 'hypercorrect' forms in American English: 'Finally, no one who observes the spoken English of America can doubt that the desire to avoid "bad grammar" plays an important part in the development of new solecisms.' See also Labov (1966a).
16. Ross King (1998: 34) notes that the 'term *han'gŭl* itself is an anachronism before 1913, when this neologism was first coined.'
17. Prior to this invention, Koreans used two approaches to writing the Korean language, each of which used Chinese characters as both 'phonograms' and 'semantograms': *idu* combined Chinese and Korean word order; *hyangch'al* followed only Korean word order (Ledyard 1998[1965]: 31–83).
18. See Ledyard (1998[1965]: 176–192) for a discussion of the oppositional Chinese sound words *sheng* and *yin* and their English glosses, 'innunciant' and 'enunciant.'
19. Historical linguists have argued that vowel harmony was weakened by a number of vowel shifts, other phonological transformations, and a steady influx of Chinese loan words. However, the linked notions that vowel harmony was as pervasive as is generally thought or that there was a major vowel-shift have also been challenged (Martin 2000).
20. The 'round' in this passage refers to a dot (·) that was situated in relation to a line (— or |) to create more complex vowel signs (e.g. ㅑ or ㅓ). The dot represented heaven, the horizontal line represented earth, and the vertical line represented the human.
21. See Hong (1991) on the on the ㅑ / ㅓ merger.
22. Kim-Renaud (1976) argued that the light/dark distinction was originally a redundant feature of a contrast between central and back vowels, which became a central principle of categorization by means of its role in the 'semantic' differentiation of 'sound symbolic' words.
23. Since yin (dark) vowels often serve as augmentatives, this fact (along with the data presented in Dillloth 1994), runs counter to arguments for the universal tendency of the [i] vowel to be associated with smallness (cf. Sapir 1929; Ohala 1994: 335–336).
24. Gal (2005: 27) elaborates as follows: 'To be fractal, a distinction must be co-constitutive, so that the terms – like right and left or east and west – define each other. Such co-constitutive contrasts can be used to organize virtually any

kind of social fact: spaces, institutions, bodies, group, activities, interactions, and relations.'

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