

## **English in Korean – Konglish**

### **Abstract**

Korean is spoken by around 75 million individuals in South Korea, North Korea, China, Japan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Russia. The relationship between Korean and other languages is not precisely known; however, several etymologists believe it to be an individual tongue from the Altaic group of languages. Human mobility and access to global information cause the interaction between one language and another, thus giving the possibility of loanwords in the native language. The Korean language is also the type of language in which many loanwords can be found. In Korean there are numerous loanwords from English. Nowadays the young Korean generation use Konglish, which is an Interlanguage consisting of English and Korean words. Konglish contains Korean lexical items with English loanwords nativized into Korean. English words used in daily conversation, advertising, and entertainment are included and seen as fashionable. However, usage of this type can frequently give rise to misunderstandings due to issues of sentence structure or vocabulary.

*Keywords:* Korean language, Konglish, borrowing, contact linguistics, corpus based analysis, loanwords.

### **Konglish – a language mix of English and Korean**

Before the Korean alphabet was invented by King Sejong in 1446, Koreans wrote in Chinese characters and used the Chinese language in daily life. Even now, Chinese characters still exist in Korean language, but have become displaced by the ever increasingly popular English.

Language in South Korea underwent great changes after the end of the Korean War (1950–1953), because Koreans began to use many words from English called Konglish kor. 콩글리쉬 [kong- geullishi]. The mix of Korean and English follows few scrupulous principles. Koreans do not copy every English term exactly; for example “nail polish” kor. 매니큐어 [maenikyueo] is used for “manicure,” not for “nail polish.” Konglish also embraces mistranslations and likewise fabricated phrases which include

English words but which are not conveniently implied by English speakers. For instance, “cell phone” is translated as 핸드폰 [hand phone]. Simple loanwords contain one single word, such as “alibi” kor. 알리비 [allibi], “champion” kor. 챔피언 [chaempieon], or “computer” kor. 컴퓨터 [keompyuteo]. On the other hand, compound loanwords are composed of at least two words, such as “sharp pencil” kor. 샤프펜슬 [syapeupenseul], “data-processing machine” kor. 데이터처리 [deiteocheoli] or “touch screen multi vision” kor. 터치스크린멀티비전 [teochiseukeulinmeoltibijeon].<sup>1</sup>

Konglish follows the rules of the deeply phonetic Korean alphabet. It is evident in the cultural structure of South Korea. The consonant at the end of the English word is often changed into a vowel in Korean: “translation,” for example: “best-seller” kor. 베스트셀러 [beseuteuselleo], “door” kor. 도어 [do-eo], “dancer” kor. 댄서 [daenseo], “over” kor. 오버 [obeo], “computer” kor. 컴퓨터 [keompyuteo].

Moreover, there is in Seoul, for example, a luxury apartment named “Luxtige,” which is a combination of the English words “luxury” and “prestige.” Suk Gee-hyun from the Korea Herald<sup>2</sup> informs us that it helps the promotion of the premium brand’s image. But Konglish can also be embarrassing. It is often translated into English directly without taking into account of cultural differences or common expressions which foreigners frequently find difficult to understand, such as those sometimes found on slogans or signboards. As an example, one of the Korean universities displays a huge slogan which spells “coffee burn” instead of “coffee bun.” English translations in restaurants are much worse and contain many misunderstandings or incomprehensible terms. There is also a linguistic division in the modern use of Konglish between South Korea and North Korea. North Korean deserters can have trouble when coming to South Korea, because much of the Konglish used there is not used in North Korea. This can lead to misunderstandings, confusion and postponed integration into society. Modern cultural use of Konglish often employs poor grammar and vocabulary, which is evident on signs, packages, and TV around Korea; for example the word “Fight!” which means not an actual fight but ‘maintain progress with something’ or ‘do not give up.’ The increase of Konglish in the Korean language has been ascribed to Koreans’ growing exposure to native English speakers, chiefly during their educational time. Koreans’ teaching of others can lead to sealing errors into the language. Lack of planning in the training system can result in inexperienced Korean teachers, who are chosen to teach English without preparation or education in teaching English. These teachers cease using Konglish in the classroom. Even well-prepared teachers might stop using materials which contain plentiful errors and Konglish. This can generate a feeling of passiveness in learning technically and structurally correct English. Students treat teachers as the example and if teachers make mistakes, these are absorbed by them.<sup>3</sup> The issue of poor Konglish has also increased in tourism relations. There is a threat that incorrect English in brochures, on signs, websites, and generally in other media might cause tourists to change their destination. This is not only a concern in remote or small places, but even mainly international locations such as Incheon Airport. More than 49 signs were found to contain English errors when the airport was opened for business. Additionally, poor Konglish usage can lead to the failure of business deals. A foreign business partner can lose confidence in a Korean company because of misunderstandings. A poll in 2010 showed that 44% of local governments in South Korea used an English phrase in their slogans. The slogans at the time included: Lucky Dongjak, Dynamic

1 See Kim Seong-kon, “Funny and embarrassing Konglish.”

2 Suk Gee-hyun, “‘Konglish’ floods into apartment brand names.”

3 See David Cohen, “‘Konglish’ replaces good English.”

Busan, Yes Gumi, Colorful Daegu, Ulsan for You, Happy Suwon, New Start! Yesan, Super Pyeongtaek, Hi-Touch Gongju, Nice Jecheon and Just Sangju.<sup>4</sup>

The heavy domination of American culture in South Korea increased the phenomenon of borrowing English words, particularly at the end of the 1980s. From that time the Korean language has started a new stage called “mixed language.” The television titles news used by media or names of department stores are borrowed from English. For example:

- “Good morning economy” kor. 굿 모닝 이코노미 in Korean [gus moning ikonomi]
- “To feel happy” kor. 기분이 나이스하다 in Korean [gibun-i naiseuhada] – TV programme name
- “KBS News Line” kor. KBS 뉴스라인 in Korean [KBS nyuseulain]
- “KBS News Panorama” kor. KBS 뉴스파노 in Korean [KBS nyuseupano]<sup>5</sup>

According to an increase of English words in use in South Korea, not only are many foreign words borrowed, but there is also a mixture of Roman letters with Hangul. For example:

<b>Konglish word (한국어)</b>	<b>revised romanization</b>	<b>actual English translation</b>
시에프	Siepeu	commercial film
레미콘	Lemikon	ready-mix concrete truck
화이트	hwaiteu	white out (correctional liquid)
드라이버	deulaibeo	screwdriver
포켓볼	pokesbol	pool (billiards game)
클립	keullib	paper clip
파스	paseu	plaster/pain relief patch
크레용	keuleyong	crayon
크레파스	keulepaseu	crayon/pastel
크림 파스타	keulim paseuta	pasta with cream sauce
매직펜	maejigpen	magic marker
오므라이스	omeulaiseu	omelette with rice filling
펑크	peongkeu	puncture (flat tire)
레포츠	lepocheu	leisure sports
글래머	geullaameo	a voluptuous woman
백댄서	baeg daenseo	backup dancer
백뮤직	baegmyujig	background music
백보컬	baeg bokeol	backing vocals
오픈카	open car	convertible
에로	elo	erotic movie
파마	pama	perm
데모	demo	demonstration/protest
다큐	docu	documentary
홈피	home-p	homepage
오에이치피	o-eichipi	overhead projector

4 See Lee Tae-hoon, “English logos popular, but often humorous.”

5 임유란: 콩글리시 대소동, 책사람 (2004: 208).

<b>Konglish word (한국어)</b>	<b>revised romanization</b>	<b>actual English translation</b>
트로트	teuloteu	foxtrot (music genre)
트랜스	teulaenseu	transformer (power)
체크	chekeu	checkered pattern
콘디션	kondisyeon	physical condition
미팅	miting	blind date
오토바이	otobai	motorcycle
팬티	paenti	underwear (male or female)
커닝	keoning	cheating
미싱	mising	sewing machine

### Konglish and loanwords

There is a difference between Konglish and loanwords, because when loanwords enter the Korean language, they do not change their meaning; it is easier for English users to understand, the pronunciation is recognizable and the meaning is exactly the same.<sup>6</sup> For example:

<b>Konglish word (한국어)</b>	<b>revised romanization</b>	<b>actual English translation</b>
컵	Keob	cup
포크	Pokeu	fork
초콜릿	Chokollis	chocolate
아이스크림	aiseukeulim	ice cream
콜라	Kolla	cola
주스	Juseu	juice
피자	Pija	pizza
비타민	Bitamin	vitamin
샌드위치	saendeuwichi	sandwich
와인	Wain	wine

When Konglish is created, the meaning of the words is changed and it is not real English. Very often words which are borrowed from English to Korean are shortened, and most of them lose the consonant at the end in exchange for a vowel, which changes the pronunciation of the word. Moreover, it is difficult to understand for foreigners, because they cannot understand the word without studying. It often happens that Konglish is composed of adding Korean morphemes and English words to create new words. In many cases native English speakers have difficulties in comprehending such words.<sup>7</sup> For example:

<b>Konglish word (한국어)</b>	<b>revised romanization</b>	<b>actual English translation</b>
오바이트	overeat	vomit
개그맨	gaegeumaen	comedian
버버리	beobeoli	trench coat

<sup>6</sup> Waterhouse (2012: 34).

<sup>7</sup> Ibidem, 34.

<b>Konglish word (한국어)</b>	<b>revised romanization</b>	<b>actual English translation</b>
에어컨	eeokeon	air conditioner
아파트	apateu	apartment
센티	senti	centimeter
리모컨	limokeon	remote control
와이셔츠	waisyoecheu	collared dress shirt
셀프	selpeu	self service
나이트	naiteu	night club
노트	noteu	notebook
헬스	helseu	health club
원피스	wonpiseu	dress
밴드	baendeu	bandage/Band-Aid
스탠드	seutaendeu	desk lamp
사이다	saida	sprite (soft drink)
아이쇼핑	aisyoping	window shopping
핫도그	hasdogeu	corn dog
더치페이	deochipei	Dutch treat
샤프	syapeu	mechanical pencil
이벤트	ibenteu	sale/promotion
원룸	wonlum	bachelor apartment
원샷	wonsyas	bottom's up
머플러	meopeulleo	scarf
핸드폰	haendeupon	cell phone
콘센트	konsenteu	electrical outlet
서비스	seobiseu	on the house / free of charge
싸인	ssain	signature
랩	laeb	plastic wrap
텔레비	tellebi	television
텔레비 프로	tellebi peulo	television program
코팅	koting	lamination

### Rules of word formation in Konglish

There are different types of English loanwords word formation processes in Korean. Loanwords should coexist with native words in Korean. An expression from one language is transferred to another language and used in everyday communication and morphological rules; but violations in phonological, semantic and syntactic aspects are very likely to occur.

It requires cultural understanding and recognition of the nuance and context. That is why an English user should proofread the expression instead of using a dictionary or translation software.

### Omitting affixes

To indicate pluralities in English nouns, it is necessary to add /-s/ or /-es/ at the end of the noun. When an English noun enters as a loanword into Korean, the inflection seems to disappear, as in the following examples:

“slippers” kor. 슬리퍼 [seullipeo], “high heels” kor. 하이힐 [haihil], “blue jeans” kor. 블루진 [beullujin], “frying pan” kor. 프라이팬 [peulaipaen] (the -ing suffix was rejected here), “curried rice” kor. 카레라이스 [kalelaiseu]

Koreans also tend to omit /-ing/ and /-ed/ suffixes in English which change the word class from verb or noun into an adjective. It is replaced by Korean suffixes such as 하다 hada, which is a verb meaning ‘to do.’ Koreans completely change the class of a word; for example, “shopping” in Korean is a noun, and when one expresses a wish to do it (verb), instead of saying “to shop” one adds the verb 하다 -hada and creates “shopping” hada kor. 쇼핑하다 [syopinghada]. The same applies to the creation of adjectives, because in Korean verbs and adjectives have the same suffixes. Korean also adds 하다 -hada to some English loanwords to create Konglish adjectives such as: “romantic” kor. 로맨틱하다 [lomaentighada].

### Coining

Korean also creates new English items. These expressions are borrowed from English, but when they enter Korean, the meaning is changed and might be difficult to understand for the English user. This word formation is called Coining. This type of phenomenon creates a completely new word. For instance: 모닝서비스 [moningseobiseu], which means ‘morning service,’ is an expression derived from English. However, when it is used in Korean, it does not mean supplying service in the morning. Instead, it is a definition which means ‘breakfast menu’ in fast food restaurants or food stands, and it is usually a menu which consists of a piece of bread, boiled egg, salad on small dish, and a cup of coffee. Moreover, there are other examples, such as “play guide” kor. 플레이가이드 [peullei gaideu] and “nightery” kor. 나이트 [naiteo]. “Play guide” refers to a ticket office in Korean. If one goes out in Korea, for instance to the theatre, a baseball game or a music concert, Koreans say 놀다 [nolda], which is translated into “play” in English. They also use “guide,” because information is available at the ticket office. This explains why they believe that “play guide” is a correct expression. The last example can also be classified by origin, because it attaches the suffix /-er/, which changes “night” into a noun. In the case of Coining, Koreans think that “nightery” is somebody who does something at night. Koreans more frequently play baseball at night. So “nightery” refers to baseball players playing the match at night.

### Acronym and abbreviation

There is a problem in the Korean language, when loanwords entering it must be converted into the Korean alphabet, so Koreans try to maintain the right pronunciation, but ultimately they do not represent the initial letters in acronyms so much as in words: LASER kor. 레이저 [leijeo], UNESCO kor. 유네스코 [yuneseuko], and NASA kor. 나사 [nasa].

There is the same issue with abbreviations. The word in Korean represents only the sound, but does not reflect the series of letters, as, for example: WTO World Trade Organization kor. 더블유티오 [deobeul-yutio] means ‘W, T, O.’

### Clipping

There are two types of clipping: front clipping and back clipping. The word “bulldozer” kor. 도저 [dojeo] is the example of front clipping. 아파트 [apateu] that is “apartment,” and 슈퍼 [supeo] “supermarket,” are examples of back clipping. Front and back clipping can take place not only in single words, but also in compound words. Examples of front clipping in compound words are: 벤츠 [bencheu] “mercedez benz,” and 콜라 [kola] “coca cola.”

### Compounding

There are many Konglish words, which are compounds of English and Korean words or English with another English word. Most importantly, compounded words are nouns and are pronounced differently. Examples of compound loanwords:

- (1) English (N) + Korean (N) Compounding:
  - 가스통 [gaseutong]: 가스 gas + 통 container = gas container
  - 디지털시계 [dijiteolsigye]: 디지털 digital + 시계 watch = digital watch
  - 버스표 [beoseupyo]: 버스 bus + 표 ticket = bus ticket
- (2) Korean (N) + English (N):
  - 감차집 [gamchajib]: 감자 potato + 집 chip = potato chip
  - 신용카드 [sin-yongkadeu]: 신용 credit + 카드 card = credit card
  - 안전벨트 [anjeonbelteu]: 안전 safety + 벨트 belt = safety belt

### Blending

Blending is very similar to compounding, but it takes only part of a word and joins one to another. In English this is a very popular phenomenon; it is easy to find such words as: brunch, which is combination of words: breakfast + lunch, Spanglish: Spanish + English, motel: motor + hotel, smog: smoke + fog. In Konglish, English words are blended into Korean, such as:

- 컴퓨터피아 [keompyuteo pia] computer + phobia = computer phobia
- 라이거 [laigeo] lion + tiger = liger

### Ambiguous, unambiguous and semantically deviated words

Ambiguous translations in Konglish are multi-interpretable, for example: 코드 [kodeu], which can be interpreted into “code,” “chord,” or “cord” or 펜 [pen], which can be equivalent to “pan” or “fan.” Unambiguous words have only one reference, for instance: 스포츠 [seupocheu] “sport,” 배드민턴 [baedeuminteon] “badminton,” 다운로드 [daunlodeu] “download.” Semantically deviated words are incorrectly translated into Korean and the meaning of the word is completely incomprehensible for English users, such as: 보이 [boi] “boy” = ‘young man serving on entertaining facilities’ or 샤프펜실 [syapeupenseul] “sharp pencil” = ‘mechanical pencil.’<sup>8</sup>

8 See *Konglish...* (2009: 23–87).

## Conclusion

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To sum up, it is necessary to say that in every single language there are borrowings from others. There are diverse types of English loanwords in Korean word formation. Loanwords must coexist with the native language to be comprehensible. To express a borrowed word in another language it is necessary to take into account such issues as violation in phonology, morphological rules, semantic and syntactic aspects and misunderstanding of incorrect translations. Nowadays English is a global language and it is borrowed by many countries all over the world as it makes communication much easier. It is also well perceived when we have English borrowings in native languages, because it is proof that the country is modern. But it requires awareness of using English borrowings, because the inappropriate use of English words gives rise to many mistakes and misunderstandings in everyday life.

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