Morpho-Phonological Patterns of Recent Korean Neologisms

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ABSTRACT
This paper analyzes the morpho-phonological patterns of recent Korean neologisms used in SNS text messages. To this end, we use the data appearing in recent newspapers and online dictionaries showing the most recent usages since 2017. During the discussion, we categorize the data into several groups and show the statistical distribution, demonstrating the dominant preference of the acronyms. We also argue that the acronyms can be coined, based not only on syllables but also on consonants including the so-called “zero” consonant <o>. We claim that this unique consonantal acronym is possible due to the unique Korean writing system which goes back to the 15th century. Furthermore, the unique graphic characteristics of the Korean writing system is reflected in a new trendy neologism, so called “Yaminjeongeum”, creating those words whose orthographic forms look similar to the original words only in shape, without carrying any meaning. Finally, we conclude the paper by claiming that the main tendencies in recent neologisms can be defined as a new bilingualism as the youngsters occasionally code-switch between standard usages and neologisms. This new trend is basically initiated by the school children and teenagers. They enjoy using the newly coined words to highlight homogeneity, i.e., for sense of closeness within a peer group. In some cases, moreover, they also enjoy the vulgarity of slang.

Keywords: neologism, coinage, acronym, code-switching, SNS, Yaminjeongeum, Korean writing system

1. INTRODUCTION
Neologisms are very common in every language all over the world as they represent the communication trends of the young generation, highlighting homogeneity [1]. Just like the cases of other languages, a lot of new coinages have been made in Modern Korean although they often become the targets of criticism for corrupting the grammatical structure. As claimed in Crystal [1], however, the usages (especially the spelling deformation) do not affect the grammatical structure or communication in the standard language. [Spelling deformation was quantitatively studied in the earlier researches (Grinter and Eldridge [2], Hård af Segerstag [3], Kasesniemi and Rautianen [4], Thurlow and Brown [5], Faulkne and Culwin [6], Tagg [7] etc.).] Therefore, many studies try to account for the new coinages, taking them as a new linguistic trend for the young generation [8-10].

2. METHODOLOGY
Investigating the overall structure of the Korean neologisms is, however, not an easy task as the new coined words keep emerging from the daily communication of the young people. Moreover, depending on the duration of the time period, the coinage pattern may become different. Considering these factors, we thoroughly analyze the patterns of the Korean neologisms which have been used in SNS text messages in recent years since 2017. During the discussion, we show how the newly coined words reflect the current trends of language usage among the younger generation. To this end, we categorize the data into several groups and discuss how they represent the current sociolinguistic trends of the young generation. We also show various cases of typical new coinages which reflect the unique Korean writing system, Hangeul.

3. TRENDS IN NEW COINAGE
The patterns of language usage among the young people are not only different from those of the older generation, but also quite unique, especially in the area of neologisms. A survey conducted in 2017 by Joongang Ilbo (one of the top 3 newspapers in Korea [11]), for example, made reference to a ‘dictionary of 2017 neologisms’ which contains 16 newly coined words. These words first appeared in a chatting group, Naver Band, then became
widespread in social media such as Facebook and Twitter (Joongang Ilbo February 8, 2017 [11]). Shown below are the examples written in Korean. (The Romanized representations shown below each example indicate the Korean pronunciations.)
(1) Representative examples of neologisms in 2017
영고, 펜아저, 취존, 외우내, 마상, 아야, 최애, hal mal ha anh, yeong go paen a jeo chwi jon wa u nae ma sang a a choe ae hal mal ha anh
서비스, o s, 비담, 인구론, 세절예, 시간, 커뮤, 갓딩작
sa bas a in jeong bi sam in gu ron se jel ye si gang keo yeup kas ting jak
At glance, especially for the older generation or even those in their 30’s, these new coinages look quite messy and distracting due to the spelling deformation (i.e., more than simple non-standard spellings) or excessive clipping. With a closer look, however, we can categorize them into several types.

3.1. Syllabic acronyms
First of all, the most common type is an acronym in which the initial syllable of each word group is picked up. (We use the official Romanization system imposed by the Korean ministry of culture in 2010.)
(2) 영고 yeong go 'person who suffers from eternal pain'
영원히 고통받는 (사람)
yeongwonhi ‘forever’
gotong-batneun ‘pain’
(saram)
취존 chwi jon 'respect other’s taste'
chwiyang ‘taste’
jonjung ‘respect’
마상 ma sang 'wounded heart'
maeunyu ‘heart’
sangcheo ‘wound’
할말하나 hal mal ha anh ‘a lot to say but wouldn’t do’
hal maleun ‘things to say’
manhjimin ‘much’
haj ‘do’
anhgesta ‘not’
최애 choe ae 'best love'
최고 매(愛, 사랑)
choego ‘best’
ae ‘love’
인구론 인문계 'No jobs for 90% of the'
in gu ron
구심퍼센트(90%)가 'without job’
 Humanities
major graduates’

in gu ron
구심퍼센트(90%)가 노다
inmung ‘humanities’
guis-p- percent-ga
‘90%’ nonda ‘without job’

세절예 se jel ye ‘the prettiest’
세상에서 젤(재일) 예쁜
sesang ‘world’ jel
‘most’ yepeun
‘pretty’
시간 si gang ‘attracting attention’
siseon jangtal
‘attention’
gangtal ‘snatch’
Moreover, acronyms can be made by combing English and Korean words as shown in the following examples.
(3) 펜아저 paen a jeo 'not a fan of a certain entertainer, but still save his/her photos’
편이 아니라도 paen-i ‘fan’
anideorado ‘though not’
jojjang ‘save’
비담 bi dam ‘the most attractive person’
비주얼 담당 bijueol ‘visual’
damdang ‘in charge’

This mixed combination can include common English function words such as “by”.
(4) 사바사 sa ba sa ‘each to one’s own’
사람 by 사람
(= 사람마다)
saram ‘person’
bai
‘by’ saram ‘person’
Furthermore, only English words can be used to make a “Korean” acronym.
(5) 아야 ayeon ‘Americana’
아이스 아메리카노
aisae ‘ice’
american ‘Americano’

Similar examples also appeared in this period (Weekly Chosun, September 19, 2017). Many of them are acronyms in which only the initial syllable is picked up from each word block. (The dots indicate syllable boundaries).
(6) More syllabic acronyms
킬킬kke ppa 'Join when to join, but quit when to quit’
킬킬 kee go ppa, jil
killske go ppa, jil
‘when to join, join’
‘when to quit, quit’

킬킬kke ppa 'Join when to join, but quit when to quit’
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3.2. Consonantal acronyms

Many of the acronyms are even simpler, picking up only the initial consonant. The following examples indicate that only the initial consonants can be used to make an acronym.

(9) ㅇㅈ  인정 ‘approved’
in jeong

The initial sound of each example is in fact a vowel, but the Korean writing system requires the initial position of syllable should be filled with a consonant orthographically including the zero consonant “ㅇ”. This tradition goes back
to the King Sejong period when the Korean alphabet system was invented [12, 13]. In this period, even the final position had to be filled with a zero consonant for a Sino-Korean word as there was a distinction between the zero consonant symbol <o> (i.e., phonetically empty) and the one for [ŋ], i.e., <ŋ> (a circle with a horn). For example, the name Sejong Eoje “King Sejong made” was written as <seO joŋ Oɔ jeOɔ> (O indicates a zero (i.e., empty) consonant symbol.).]

As Modern Korean specifies only the initial zero symbol with a circle, the onset zero symbol is spelled like the coda /ŋ/. The following example shows the identical transcription of both the onset zero and the final /ŋ/. As the single use of a zero symbol could be confusing in a short, i.e., mono-syllabic word, both circles are used to indicate the zero onset and the nasal coda respectively. That is the “o o” acronym shows that the first “o” indicates a zero consonant, while the second “o” represents /ŋ/ as they are identically orthographically.

(12)  o o  데우 ‘Yes, right’
      η     ㄷ звуч

The coining by consonantal acronym is extended to those commonly used Romanized expressions. For examples, as both 오키 ‘Ok’ and Ok are commonly used, the youngsters often use the following Romanized acronyms.

(13) TMI  Too Much
     Information

JMT  Jeong Mal
     Max.is.ta

‘really’ ‘tasty’

3.3. Showbiz words, sound symbolic neologisms

As the influence of the TV show programs is getting stronger for the young generation, a popular expression can be used for new coineage. For example, an entertainer (Park Junhyeong who grew up in the US) with poor Korean proficiency often used “Wow” in a show program, and thus a newly coined word is often used among the young people. [The second examples reflect the modern vowel change by which the two front vowels /ɛ/ ə and /e/ ə have been merged. These two vowels are pronounced the same in Modern Korean, especially in the speech of the young people.]

(14) 와우내  Wow + 내
     nae  nae ‘be’

On the other hand, just like in the past, some newly-coined expressions are based on the names of the characters in TV advertisements. For example, changryeol-hada ‘not worthy or tasty’ and hyeja-seureopda ‘it is worthy’. (15) New coinage with proper names (originated from TV shows)

장렬하다  ‘not tasty, not worthy’
(Changryeol ‘a proper name’)

해자스럽다 hyeja-seu.reop.da  ‘tasty, worthy’ (Hyeyeja ‘a proper name’)

The first expression was named after an entertainer who made a lunch box sold at convenience stores but it was not very tasty. Then, by analogy, the opposite expression was made in reference to another entertainer. These examples, in fact, originated from the satiric political expressions made in the period of the late Korean president Noh Mu-Hyeon. Early on in his presidency, he had a hot debate with the prosecutors regarding the limit of their powers. As a consequence, the following expressions were made, reflecting the socio-political situation at that period. Similar examples can be made, employing proper names or the names of certain specific professions.

(16) 놀현스럽다 nom.hyeon.seu.reop.da  ‘He/she behaves like the president Noh.’
     Noh Mu-Hyeon ‘seem to be’
(Nom.hyeon is a contacted form of Noh Mu-Hyeon)

점사그립다 geom.sa.seu.reop.da  ‘He/she behaves like a real prosecutor.’
‘prosecutor’ ‘seem to be’

3.4. Methodolgy of analysis: a statistical analysis

The biggest Korean online dictionary, Naver open dictionary, posted the 30 most commonly used examples of neologisms in 2019 (Naver open dictionary 2020 [14]). The data collection was based on messages sent on mobile phones and personal computers. Shown below are the 30 examples of new coinages. (The dots indicate syllable boundaries in writing.)

| Table1 Types (A: acronym, F: foreign loanword, S: sound mimicry, T: trendy expression) |
|---|---|---|
| Ranking | Words | Meaning |
| /type | | |

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| 1. F | 인플루언서 | 'Influencer', 'person having many followers at SNS’ on social networks? |
| 2. A | 자만추 | 자연스러운 만남 추구 |
| 3. F | 플렉스 | 'Flex, pursy person showing off his/her wealth’ (often used in rap music) |
| 4. A/F | 편스토랑 | 편의점+ 레스토랑 |
| 5. F | 무스비 | From the popular expression in a Japanese animation, ‘무스비(結び. musubi) meaning 'destiny' |
| 6. F | 번아웃 증후군 | ‘Burnout’ + jeung.hu.gun ‘syndrome’ \(\rightarrow\) ‘Burnout Syndrome’ (exhausted) |
| 7. S | 비역 | ‘ideophonic rejoinder which reflects the sound before eating’ (e.g., chik.chik.phok.phok ‘chug chug’ beo.eok ‘sausage+rice cake’ beo.eok, gimchi.jjige ‘kimchi stew’ beo.eok, etc.) |
| 8. S/F | 티키타카 | From Spanish tiqui-taca meaning a strategy of a football game using quick short passes (Now, it is also used for a situation for amicable quick conversation.) |
| 9. A | 소떡소떡 | 소시지 + 떡 |
| 10. A | 처돌이 | cheo-dol(da) ‘get crazy’ + i ‘person’ (Originaed from a mascot of chicken café, it often means a person having a mania for something, e.g., Johnwick.cheo.dol.i ‘John Wick mania’ or do.thi.cheo.dol.i |
| 11. A/F | 스폴 | Acronym of the game 'Special force’ (e.g., seu.po haja ‘Let’s play the game ‘special force.’) Acronym of (movie) spoiler’ (e.g., seu.po ha.ji.ma.ra ‘Don’t tell the overall story of a movie in advance.) |
| 12. A | 열죽아 | 열어 죽어도 아이스 |
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|   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| 13. F | 까멜리아 | 'Name of a store on a KBS drama, i.e., 'camellia' meaning 'waiting, ardent love' |
| 14. S | 쓰앵님 | Ideophonic coinage, reflecting seon.saeng.nim (선생님) 'Mr. Sir'. The popularity came from a drama in which seon.saeng.nim was pronounced as sseu.aeng.nim. |
| 15. A | 등드름 | 동 + 어드름 deung 'back' + yeo.deu.reum 'pimple' → 'pimple on one’s back' |
| 16. F | 민 | mim 'meme' mimeme 'unknown' (Greek) + 'gene' ‘an idea or element of social behaviour passed on through generations in a culture, especially by imitation’ |
| 17. A | 파이어족 | ‘Fi (Financial Independenc)’ + ‘Retire Early’ + jok 'tribe' → ‘People in the 30’s or 40’s who take early retirement after achieving financial indenpence’ |
| 18. A | 꾸안꾸 | 꾸민 듯 안 꾸민 듯 ‘unclear if make up is put on or not’ 꾸민 듯 안 꾸민 듯 ‘as if using make-up’ ‘as if not using make-up’ |
| 19. A | 만반잘부 | 만나서 반가워 잘 부탁해 man.na.seo ban.ga.weo jal bu.tak.hae 'meet’ ‘glad’ ‘well’ ‘take care’ → 'Nice to meet you’ |
| 20. T | 나만없이고양이 | ‘Everybody has a cat, except me.’ It represents a person who is envious of those who have cats.’ |
| 21. A/F | 유하 | Youtube + hi (It is often used in one-person mass media, e.g., youtube-gam.i.da ‘worth being put on ‘Youtube’.) |
| 22. A | 학종 | hak.saeng.bu jong.hap jeon.hyeong ‘school report’ ‘comprehensive’ ‘assessment’ →a qualitative assessment report for student’s overall performance. It is used as an essential evaluation basis for college entrance exam. |
| 23. F | 유니콘기업 | yu.ni.kon + gi.eop ‘unicorn’ ‘company’ |
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| No. | Example | Explanation |
|-----|---------|-------------|
| 24. A | 존맛탱 | 'good' 'taste' 'thing' → 'very tasty'  
(A similar example is 졸귀탱 jol.gwi.taeng 'very cute'.) |
| 25. S | 라떼는 말이야 | It is a satirical expression of na.ttae.neun mal.i.ya 'when I was (somebody important)', from which the first part, na.ttae, is changed to la.tte '(café) latte' due to the similarity in sounds. (An initial liquid is realized as [n] in Korean, so /l/ and /n/ are pronounced the same. v [This process discouraging initial liquids in Korean is called "Initial avoidance' [15]]. The younger generation even go further, making 'Latte is horse', as the Korean word mal 'a story or situation' and the English word horse are homophonous in Korean. |
| 26. T | 몸신 | mom 'body' + sin 'god'  
It means somebody who has succeeded in making a healthy body. (It is quite similar to 몸짱 mom.jjang 'a muscle-bound person.') |
| 27. A | 오놀아놈 | o.u nol jul a.neun nom.in.ga  
'Oh' ‘able to play’ 'guy'  
'Somebody who knows how to play well' |
| 28. A | 인만추 | in.wi.jeok.in man.nam.eul chu.gu.ha.da  
'man-made' ‘meeting’ ‘seek’  
'It means ‘seeking for a meeting which is planned by a third party’.' |
| 29. T | 수능금지곡 | su.hak.neung.ryeok.si.heom geum.ji.gok  
'Scholastic aptitude test’ ‘forbidden song’  
'It means those songs which linger in the head, distracting students’ attention while they are preparing for the SAT or taking an examination.' |
| 30. T/F? | 셰포마켓 | 세포 se.po 'cell' + 마켓 ma.ket 'market'  
It indicates a 'cell market’, i.e., a type of marketing which makes use of online platforms, such as SNS or blogs. They also use the term 'cell sumer' to indicate those individuals (e.g., instagrammer) who manages cell market’ (< 'pro-sumer' |
As we have already assumed, the most dominant pattern of new coinage is an acronym in which only a part of each word (or phrase) is picked up for combination. In most cases, the initial syllable is chosen for combination. (17) a. 자연스러운 만났추구

\[ \text{ja.yeon.seu.reo.un} \quad \text{man.nam.chu.gu.} \]

'unaFFECTed' meeting' seek' ‘seeking unaffected meeting’
b. 인위적인 만났추구하다

\[ \text{in.wi.jeok.in} \quad \text{man.nam.eul.chu.gu.ha.da} \]

'man-made' meeting' seek' ‘seeking a meeting which is planned by a third party’. The first example (17a) means ‘seeking an unaffected meeting’. Contrary to this expression, the younger generation also use the 인만추 in (17b), meaning ‘seeking for a meeting which is planned by a third party’.

Contrary to these acronyms taking the initial syllables, however, the remaining parts of the second word can be used if the initial syllable cannot convey any meaning. In the following example, for instance, the first syllable of the second word in (18a), yeo, does not mean anything, so they take the rest of the second word. In this case, they take all the remaining parts, i.e., more than one syllable, so that the meaning can be recovered more easily in the new coinage. Taking all the remaining syllables from the second word can be observed in the other example (18b) taking a foreign loanword.

(18) a. 동 + 여드름
deung ‘back’ + yeo.deu.reum ‘pimple’ → ‘pimple on one’s back’
b. 편의점 + 레스토랑
Pyeon.eui.jeom ‘convenience store’ + re.seu.to.rang ‘restaurant’

There are many cases of new coinages making use of foreign loanwords. The popularity of foreign (especially English) words can be observed even in sound mimicry. (19) 라떼는 말이야

la.tte.neun mal.i.ya ‘When I was someone…’

It is a satirical expression of na.ttae.mal.i.ya ‘when I was (somebody important)’ which is frequently used by the older generation. It literally means ‘(When I was young or somebody important), my situation was…’ The first part, na.ttae, is changed to la.tte which sounds like the popular drink ‘(café) latte’. (An initial liquid is realized as [n] in Korean, so /l/ and /n/ are pronounced the same. [This process discouraging initial liquids in Korean is called ‘Initial avoidance’(Ahn 2010).]) This type of pun even produces the expression, ‘Latte is horse’ as the Korean word 말 ‘a story or situation’ and the English word horse are homophonous in Korean.

The final type of new coinage is the use of trendy expressions, mostly from TV programs, e.g., dramas or talk shows. The following example, for example, became famous, representing a person who is envious of those who have cats. ‘It reflects the current social trend in Korea where a lot of people have pet cats (or dogs). (20) 나만 없어고양이

na.mam.eop.seo go.yang.i ‘Everybody has a cat, except me.’

We can also find certain expression reflecting the hot issues the youngsters have to face. For examples, the following case means “earworms”, those songs which linger in the head, distracting students’ attention while they are preparing SAT or taking examination.

(21) 수학능력시험 + 금지곡

su.hak.neung.ryeok.si.heom geum.ji.gok
‘Scholastic aptitude test’ ‘forbidden song’

The following table shows the categorical distribution of the newly coined expressions, along with the overlapping pattern.

### Table 2 Categorical distribution

| Types               | Total (30) | Overlap with acronym | Overlap with Foreign word | Overlap with sound mimicry | Overlap with trend |
|---------------------|------------|----------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------|
| Acronym             | 15         | -                    | 3                        | -                         | -                 |
| Foreign word        | 12         | 3                    | -                        | 1                         | 1                 |
| Sound mimic         | 4          | -                    | 1                        | -                         | -                 |
| Trendy expression   | 4          | -                    | 1                        | -                         | -                 |

Among the 30 most representative examples of new coinage, we can notice that acronyms make up half of the new coinages, while all the patterns overlap with the new coinage with foreign words. So, taking the overlapping examples into account, we can show the distributional pattern of the new coined expressions as follows, in which the most dominant pattern is the acronym which is followed by the new coinage with foreign words.
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The overlapping pattern of each category can be better shown in the following diagram which shows that the 15 acronyms are the most dominant pattern making up 50%, followed by the 12 coinages with foreign words. Although all four categories overlap with other areas, the usage of foreign words (marked in orange) is observed in all categories, which reflects the preference of the foreign words in the speech of the younger generation.

Figure 1 Distributional pattern

In addition to these new neologisms in 2017, the following examples are often used as well.

(23) 유쾌 ‘gaiety’ → 육쾌
명언 ‘maxim’ → 명언 [16]
명명이 ‘dogyg’ → 명명이 [14]

A very popular examples is the ‘meaningless’ name of a noodle product. The ‘meaningless’ name <괄도 네넴띤 gwaldo nenemtin> humorously indicates <팔도 비빔면 paldo bibimmyeon ‘spicy mixed noodle’> based on Yaminjeongum since the orthographic shapes of the former look like the latter in Korean alphabet. [The name of the new word-formation process Yaminjeongum (야민정음) was made by changing the initial word of Hunminjeongum (훈민정음). The Hunminjeongum ‘correct sound for teaching people’ is a document describing an entirely new and native script for the Korean language. It was made and promulgated to the public by King Sejong the Great in the 15th century.]

(24) 팔도 비빔면 → 괄도 네넴띤
This orthographic similarity/possible misreading made this product more popular, so that the company is now using the (meaningless) name (네넴띤) as a new noodle brand (괄도 네넴띤) as shown in the following illustration.

(25) a. 팔도 비빔면 vs. 괄도 네넴낀
(26) New brand from orthographic similarities
5. CONCLUSITON AND FURTHER EXTENSION

So far, we have discussed the patterns of new neologisms in Korean, based on the recent data collected since 2017. We first categorized the data into several groups in which the acronym is the most preferred type for new coinages. Then, displaying the statistical distribution of the major types of new coinage, we argued for the young people’s dominant preference of the acronyms. We also showed that the acronyms can be coined, based not only on syllables but also on consonants including the so-called “zero” consonant <o>. We claimed that this unique consonantal acronym is possible due to the unique Korean writing system which goes back to the King Sejong period in the 15th century, requiring all the three CVC slots be filled in orthographically to form a complete syllable in that period. Furthermore, the unique graphic characteristics of the Korean writing system is reflected in a new trendy neologism, so called “Yaminjeongeum”, creating those words whose orthographic forms look similar to the original words only in shape, without carrying any meaning.

The main tendencies in recent neologisms can be defined as a new bilingualism as the youngsters occasionally code-switch between the standard usages and neologisms. This new trend is basically initiated by the younger generation, e.g., school children and teen agers. They enjoy using the newly coined words to highlight homonyny, i.e., for sense of closeness within a peer group. In some cases, moreover, they also enjoy the vulgarity of slangs.

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As English expressions or Roman letters are commonly used in Korea, this type of neologism can be very popular, especially among young people. Also, the neologism in the area of food and drink is very productive as shown in J-S. Lee [8], taking 7.1 % in 2002-2006 and 5.3 % in 2012-2016.
Due to the political controversies, these expressions are not listed even in the open dictionary, yet. Nonetheless, the tendency for these political verbal violence is on the rise as the whole society is being divided into two opposing political areas. Being based on the younger generations’ innovative coinages, the usage of these expressions are now widespread and are certain to continue for a certain period of time.

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