

## Research Article

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# Mixed Feelings: Attitudes towards English loanwords and their use in South Korea

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**Abstract:** This questionnaire study investigates South Korean students' attitudes towards English loanwords and their use. Even though English enjoys high prestige in Korean society and is considered a requirement for personal and professional advancement, usage of English loanwords is evaluated predominantly negatively or with mixed feelings. For loanwords that semantically deviate from standard English meanings and thus demonstrate Korean identity (i.e., Konglish loanwords), the evaluations turn even more to the negative. Nevertheless, participants also posit positive aspects of general English and Konglish loanword use and, additionally, put forward a variety of perceived reasons for using English words. This study shows that general positive attitudes related to a language can be reversed or at least modified when it comes to the combination of the prestigious language with the native language.

**Keywords:** loanwords; language attitudes; English in Korea; Konglish; lexical borrowing

## 1 Introduction

Loanwords from English are a common phenomenon in most of the world's languages. Besides cataloguing and analyzing their functions, types, and integration processes, it is also indispensable to investigate how loanwords are perceived by speakers and which attitudes are linked with them and their use. The study at hand provides insights into the perceptions and attitudes towards English loanwords in the South Korean (henceforth Korean) context. English loanwords are extremely pervasive in the Korean language (Lee 1996, Lawrence 2010) and thus part of every Korean's linguistic repertoire. Their abundance, however, does not automatically entail a positive attitude. As one can see in this paper, various competing notions are connected to English in Korea in general and this study of university students' attitudes towards English loanwords provides valuable observations on the sociolinguistic negotiations involved when it comes to their use.

As most other countries in the world, Korea has been and remains in substantial contact with Anglophone culture and language. Even though it is not an official language, the presence of English is very visible in Korea. Certain fields, such as advertising, product design, and pop culture provide particularly nourishing soil for the English language (Lee 2004, Lee 2006, Lawrence 2010, Lee 2011a, Lee 2016). Additionally, English functions as a prestige and status marker in Korean society (Shim & Baik 2004: 182). This contrasts with the still highly monolingual and monocultural character of Korean society (Park 2013: 287) and induces the question of the status and perception of English loanwords by members of the Korean speech community. Korea, therefore, presents a fascinating case in point when it comes to loanword research, as the notion of English as a highly valuable commodity and even status symbol clashes with the monolingualism and the strong association of Korean identity with the Korean language (Coulmas 1999, Park 2010: 63). Despite the compelling research background, the Korean context has been largely neglected by research on English

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loanwords, especially when it comes to attitudes and usage by the general population.

The first section of this paper presents a short theoretical overview of English loanwords in the world's languages, which is subsequently narrowed down to a focus on Asia. Despite the geographical proximity and some similarities in the sociolinguistic situation in Korea and Japan, it is surprising that the latter has attracted a far bigger share of attention in loanword research. The theoretical section will thus zoom in on English loanword research in Japan as it provides a compelling point of reference before coming to the specific setting of English in the Korean context. The next section introduces previous research on English loanwords in Korea and is followed by the methodology. The aim of this study is to describe the perception of profuse English loanword users by their fellow Koreans, the perceived reasons for using English loanwords in the first place, and the attitudes towards English loanwords that have undergone semantic shift. The results demonstrate mixed feelings towards English loanwords as expressed by the participants. Furthermore, a number of perceived reasons for loanword use within the Korean context, ranging from practical to historical, are uncovered in the analysis which allows to shed light on the so-far underexposed life of English loanwords in South Korea.

## 2 English loanwords around the world

English-based loanwords (also called Anglicisms) concern lexical material, stemming originally from English, that is incorporated into a different language. As Poplack and Sankoff (1984) argue, it can be problematic to distinguish between the use of loanwords, code-switching, and interference. They consequently offer four characteristics for the successful identification of loanwords: frequency of use, native-language synonym replacement, morphophonemic/syntactic integration, and acceptability (Poplack and Sankoff 1984, 103-104), the latter being of key interest also in the study of language attitudes.

English, as one of the main lingua francas and the global language of the present time, has been the source for extensive borrowing for many languages. Central reasons for English becoming the major player at the forefront of global languages are mainly of historical, economic, and political nature, such as the Industrial Revolution in 19<sup>th</sup> century Britain and North American as well as British colonialism (Görlach 2003, 6-7). An additional force is the rise of a global network, which has created an increasing necessity for international communication. One of the results of the aforementioned processes is the widespread use of English around the world. Furthermore, English has become a source of loanwords for other languages instead of a recipient (Görlach 2003: 7). This is not to say that English does not or has not extensively borrowed from other languages as well, as words like *kindergarten* (from German) or *sushi* (from Japanese) demonstrate. Nowadays, however, English itself is an influential resource for the acquisition of new or additional words for other languages, thereby “reflecting the importance and status it holds as a leading language” (Kowner & Rosenhouse 2008: 4).

### 2.1 Anglicisms in Asian languages: Focus on Japan

English loanwords have been investigated in a range of Asian languages besides Korean (see, e.g., Raksaphet 1991, Suthiwan & Tadmor 2009 for Thai; Alves 2009 for Vietnamese; Lai 2008, Wiebusch & Tadmor 2009 for Chinese). Anglicisms in Japanese, for example, have been reported as extremely pervasive and have thus attracted a particular wealth of academic attention (Quackenbush 1974, Loveday 1996, Daulton 2004, Stanlaw 2005, Honna 2008, Kowner & Daliot-Bul 2008, Schmidt 2009, Irwin 2011, Yano 2011, Moody & Matsumoto 2012, Scherling 2012). As the Korean and Japanese sociolinguistic context share a number of similarities (e.g., no Anglophone colonial background, the national language perceived as strong identity marker, a certain historical isolation based on (pen)insular geography), the insights gained from loanword research in the Japanese context are of inherent interest to this study as well. Even though originating from English, many of the English loanwords in Japanese have changed their meaning more or less dramatically, making them, at times, hard or even impossible to understand for people not familiar with Japanese language

and culture. These loanwords “are terms made in Japan for Japanese consumption” (Stanlaw 2005: 20), as exemplified by ‘virgin road’ (*baajin roodo*; the “church aisle a bride walks down” (Stanlaw 2005: 41)) or ‘paper driver’ (*peepaadoraiba*; “a person who has their licence, but rarely actually drives” (Stanlaw 2005: 42)). Stanlaw refers to this phenomenon as “Japanese English” and argues that due to the “home-grown” (2005: 20) status of these words they should be rather seen as “English-inspired vocabulary items” (2005: 20) than as words simply borrowed from English. A similar phenomenon of ‘home-grown’ English-based lexical items exists in Korea, where English loanwords which underwent considerable semantic shift are often referred to as Konglish. The term ‘Konglish’ itself is associated with a range of meanings and is, for example, also used to refer to the respective Koreanized English variety, mistakes made by Koreans when using English, or the Korean learners’ variety of English. Acknowledging that “[t]here is no generally agreed definition of Konglish” (Hadikin 2014: 9), the use of the term ‘Konglish’ in this paper refers to the “specific [English-based] set of lexical items generally considered unique to Korea” (Hadikin 2014: 9).

Regarding comprehension of English loanwords and attitudes towards them in the Japanese context, Irwin (2011, 199-200) was able to identify two trends: older people have more problems understanding loanwords than younger people (a finding which Irwin himself does refer to as unsurprising) and a “love-hate relationship” with loanwords. This ‘love-hate relationship’ manifests as follows:

Although some [Japanese] view loanwords in a linguistically imperialistic or colonialist light as a threat to Japanese culture and tradition, many others view them as indispensable [sic] for creating a more advanced, democratic society. Some view the ever-increasing proportion of loanwords found in daily newspapers and school textbooks as a hindrance to comprehension and learning. Others are acutely aware that the large-scale absorption of Western ideas, technology and loanwords which came with the late 19th century opening up of Japan played a major role in saving the country from the colonial fate of most other Asian nations. (Irwin 2011: 200)

Stanlaw’s argument, mentioned in the previous paragraph, that English loanwords in Japan mainly consist of lexical items “created within Japan and within the Japanese cultural and linguistic matrix” (2005: 37), can be seen as in line with the positive attitudes connected to English loanwords found by Irwin (2011), that is, the ‘love’ in the ‘love-hate relationship’. If the English loanwords are seen as being created within the Japanese framework, they are not an intruder of a foreign language but a creative representation of Japanese society, culture, and language, which is reflected in their assimilation to Japanese linguistic structures (see, e.g., Loveday 1996, Stanlaw 2005, Scherling 2013).

It remains to be seen whether attitudes towards English loanwords in Korea are indeed similar to the views reported in Irwin (2011). The following section presents an overview of the contact situation in Korea, followed by a summary of previous research on Anglicisms in Korea.

## 2.2 Setting the scene: English in Korea

The status of English in Korea is so exceptional that it has been designated the “language of ultimate importance” (Park 2009: 1). Indeed, English is seen by Koreans as indispensable for leading a successful life: English competence enables one to succeed not only career-wise but also in private life. English functions as a social indicator and is the “key to upward social mobility” (Park 2009: 37). Even though Korea has traditionally been described as a highly monolingual and monocultural country (Park 2013: 287), English has become so pervasive within the society that ignorance of English is perceived as burdensome in everyday life (Lee 2016). Korean identity is strongly connected to speaking Korean and English is not only perceived but also actively positioned as the “language of an Other” (Park 2009: 26). Contact possibilities, however, are manifold. English is, for example, very visible in Korean pop culture (see, e.g., Lee 2004, Lee 2007), advertising (see Lee 2006), product design, and the linguistic landscape in general (see Lawrence 2012, Tan & Tan 2015). Besides, several English-medium newspapers are produced and circulated in Korea (e.g., *The Korea Herald*, *The Korea Times*, and *JoongAng Daily*). Korean children officially start learning English in the third grade of elementary school but in reality English-medium kindergartens are a popular choice for Korean parents. Regular kindergartens usually offer at least some English classes, often with the

aid of English native speakers. A plethora of additional possibilities for English education exist: private educational academies (so-called *Hagwon*), English villages (model villages simulating life in a Western, English-speaking country staffed with native speakers of English; see Lee 2011b), and short-term as well as long-term study abroad. Nowadays, the desire for English language instruction in Korea is so high that experts even refer to an ‘English Fever’ (see, e.g., Shim & Park 2008).

It is not surprising then that strong attitudes towards English exist in Korean society. In a study of media representations and uses of cross-cultural humor, Park (2009) identified three prevailing attitudes when it comes to English: necessitation, externalization, and self-deprecation. These three ideologies complement but also contrast with each other and are highly visible in Korean society. English is more than just highly valued in Korea: it is regarded as a necessary factor for Korea’s endurance in the globalized world (Park 2009: 26). English competence is valued as an essential resource not only in the economical field, but also in culture and politics (Park 2009: 26). Nevertheless, English clearly is a language of the other, which does not belong to Korea. The Korean language is strongly associated with Korean identity (and vice versa), which, in the end, presents English as an intruder into the linguistic landscape of Korea. Open endorsement of English could then be interpreted as “a betrayal of one’s identity and a disruption of the social order upon which that identity is based” (Park 2009: 26). The third ideology, self-deprecation, refers to Koreans perceived lack of English competence. Many Koreans themselves believe that they are intrinsically unable to acquire English to a sufficient degree. As Park (2009) has shown, this view is also disseminated in newspapers and TV shows, even though it blatantly disregards linguistic realities, where a spectrum of English proficiencies is reached by Korean learners of English.

Other research on language attitudes in Korea is scarce, apart from two comprehensive studies on professional groups with a special linguistic investment: Korean teachers of English (Ahn 2014, Ahn 2017) and Korean-English translators and interpreters (Cho 2017). Cho demonstrates the cultural, economic, political, social, and symbolic capital represented by English for Korean translators and interpreters (2017: 170) and argues that this specific demographic group is driven by the goal to become ‘the perfect English speaker’ (as propagated in the media). From Ahn’s research on Korean teachers of English (2014, 2017), we know that educators experience an internal conflict when it comes to teaching English. According to Ahn (2014, 215-216), high school teachers prefer American English as target variety due to their obligation to prepare students for proficiency tests, while at the same time valuing a localized Korean English variety for cultural and linguistic needs. This localized, that is *nativized*, Korean English variety has until the recent past been rather elusive (despite some initial evidence presented by Jung & Min 1999, Shim 1999). Only recently has this variety been described more extensively and with sound corpus-based methods (Hadikin 2014, Rüdiger 2016, Rüdiger 2017a, Rüdiger 2017b).

## 2.3 English loanwords in Korean

Modern Korean vocabulary consists of three strata: native Korean words, Sino-Korean words, and loanwords from other languages. Words from Chinese make up the largest proportion of the vocabulary, as Sohn (2006: 44) estimates that Sino-Korean items account for 65%, native Korean words for 30%, and loanwords from other languages for 5% of present-day Korean vocabulary. Sino-Korean words, mainly the result of historical borrowing processes (Sohn 2006: 44), are integrated into Korean so well and have been introduced into the language such a long time ago that, although they originally stem from Chinese, they are usually not regarded as loanwords per se (McTague 1990: 13). Modern borrowing patterns have mainly resulted in loanwords from Japanese and European languages. According to Sohn (1999: 118) “the total number of current loan words [in Korean] is estimated at over 20,000, of which English occupies over 90%”. It is very likely, however, that the number of English loanwords has considerably risen since Sohn’s 1999 estimate due to increased globalization and further technological advances (an informal survey by the author of a Korean-English dictionary listing basic vocabulary items, the *Oxford Picture Dictionary English / Korean* (Adelson-Goldstein & Shapiro 2009), for example, reveals that more than 28% of the total of 4414 items listed in the dictionary were of English origin).

When English loanwords are borrowed into Korean, they are adapted to reflect Korean syllable structure rules and pronunciation (as well as being transformed into *Hangeul*, the Korean alphabet). Thus, an epenthetic vowel is added to the original lexical item ‘bus’ to form the Korean English loanword ‘beo-seu’ (버스) or the voiced labiodental fricative /v/ which does not form part of the Korean phoneme inventory is replaced by a stop, resulting in ‘ba-i-ol-lin’ (바이올린; from English ‘violin’). ‘Ba-i-ol-lin’ and ‘beo-seu’ are two examples for a rather straightforward loanword transfer from English to Korean, showing only phonological and orthographic adaptation. Other loanwords, however, show further adaptations, which Kim (2012: 15) subsumes under the four processes of semantic shift, creative compounding, mixed-code combination, and clipping. Loanwords that have undergone semantic shift are often designated ‘Konglish’ (i.e., a mixture of English and Korean as reflected in the blend ‘Konglish’ itself). In order to differentiate this lexical aspect of Konglish from other potential uses of the term Konglish (which is at times also used to refer to, e.g., Koreanized pronunciation of English in general), loanwords which have undergone considerable processes of semantic shift and/or lexical creativity (cf. Stanlaw’s (2005) ‘English-inspired vocabulary items’ in Japan) will be referred to as ‘Konglish loanwords’ in this paper. Well-known examples for Konglish loanwords are ‘keon-ning’ (컨닝; from English ‘cunning’ = ‘cheating’) and ‘haen-deu-pon’ (핸드폰; from English ‘hand phone’ = ‘mobile phone/cellphone’). More examples of Korean English loanwords can be found in Table 1 (category 2-5 examples from Kim 2012) and in Kim (2016).

**Table 1.** English Loanword Categories and Examples (Based on Kim 2012)

Category	Examples
1 direct	<i>o-ren-ji</i> (오렌지; from English ‘orange’ [fruit]) <i>i-me-il</i> (이메일; from English ‘email’) <i>wa-in</i> (와인; from English ‘wine’)
2 semantic shift (Konglish)	<i>tael-leon-teu</i> (탤런트; from English ‘talent’ = ‘celebrity’) <i>bil-la</i> (빌라; from English ‘villa’ = ‘apartment units’) <i>seu-taen-deu</i> (스탠드; from English ‘stand’ = ‘lamp’)
3 creative compounding	<i>a-i syo-ping</i> (아이 쇼핑; from English ‘eye shopping’ = ‘window shopping’) <i>baek-mi-reo</i> (백미러; from English ‘back mirror’ = ‘rearview mirror’)
4 mixed-code combinations	<i>an-jeon bel-teu</i> (안전 벨트; Korean word for ‘safety’ + English ‘belt’ = ‘safety belt’) <i>gam-ja chip</i> (감자 칩; Korean word for ‘potato’ + English ‘chip’ = ‘potato chip’)
5 clipping	<i>sel-ka</i> (셀카; clipping of English ‘self-camera’ to ‘sel-ka’ = ‘selfie’) <i>mae-seu keom</i> (매스 컴; clipping of English ‘mass communication’ to ‘mass com’ = ‘media’)

Tranter (1997: 147) lists several reasons for borrowing from English in Korea and Japan, but two appear to be the main factors. First of all, “the compulsory status of English education, [sic] has resulted in Koreans and Japanese having an extensive knowledge of English” (Tranter 1997: 147). This has allowed Koreans and Japanese to become very familiar with the English language “even though the chances to speak in English outside the classroom environment are small” (Tranter 1997: 147). This limited possibility to speak English outside the classroom is mainly due to the relatively low number of foreigners residing in Korea. According to 2015 statistics, 3.4% of the Korean population are foreign residents (Eum 2015). This, however, does not account for short term stays (e.g., tourists) and also does not reflect the steady rise of the number of foreign residents in Korea over the last decade (Eum 2015). A large part of the foreigners staying in Korea are, however, from China or other Asian countries and it remains to be investigated which language(s) are used in specific contact situations.

Another factor regarding the disposition to borrowing from English in Korea is that foreign lexical material is often a marked choice “because the native language is the vehicle of everyday communication” (Tranter 1997: 147). Correspondingly, borrowings, particularly from Western languages, can be “more emotive, more cosmopolitan, and more modern in their feel” (Tranter 1997: 147). This is also the reason why many English loanwords start their course of life in advertising, mass media, and pop culture, before consequently making the transition to everyday language (Tranter 1997: 147).

Attitudes towards the donor language naturally affect borrowing as “language loyalty and language

ideology are important factors that can constrain borrowing. Loyalty to one language and pride in its autonomy promotes resistance to foreign incursions” (Winford 2010: 178). Korea as such exhibits “relatively stable monolingualism and linguistic homogeneity, strong nationalistic attitudes and a rich heritage of national culture and identity” (Park 2009: 2). English is, therefore, at times considered an intruder or even a danger for the Korean language and culture (cf. the ideology of English as the language of the ‘Other’ mentioned above). These sentiments are strongly connected with language purism and several organizations try to protect the Korean language from external influences (especially English) and voice the view that Anglicisms should be avoided and their usage restricted. Such organizations include the non-governmental and non-academic *Hangeul Munhwa Yeondae* (‘Hangeul Culture League’) and *Gukeo Munhwa Undong Bonbu* (‘Headquarters of the Korean Language Culture Movement’) (see Park 1989, Park 2009).

There are also factors which facilitate borrowing from English to Korean. English has the connotation of being ‘cool’ and ‘modern’ and, therefore, is frequently used as a commercial strategy in advertisements (see, e.g., Lee 2006). Due to economic, cultural, and political reasons, English is often seen as a necessity by Koreans. In order to function in the global marketplace, the Korean economy is dependent on English. Therefore, English in Korea is seen “as a valuable and indispensable language” (Park 2009: 26) and has an elevated position in the Korean school system. The social and economic prestige awarded to English and English proficiency (Shin 2007: 78) may well be one of the main motivations for lexical borrowing.

Research regarding the actual use of English loanwords in Korea and connected attitudes is scarce. Tyson (1993: 30) claims that “there seems to be very little practical resistance to the use of English loanwords among Koreans of varying age, sex, occupation, education, and social class”. It is unclear, however, in how far this applies to the Korean context more than 20 years later and is additionally based solely on personal experiences and casual observations.

### 3 Methods

The data for this study was collected via an online questionnaire from November 2011 to the beginning of January 2012. All questions were formulated in English but participants were given the possibility to answer in Korean if preferred. The questionnaire enquired into several aspects of English loanwords in Korea, but only the three content questions regarding loanword attitudes (and of course the demographic information provided by the participants) are considered in this paper:

- 1) What do you think about Korean people who use many English loanwords when speaking Korean?
- 2) Why do you think do many Korean people use a lot of English loanwords?
- 3) What do you think about English loanwords which are considered to be Konglish?

for example: ‘컨닝’ (cunning = ‘cheating’)

‘핸드폰’ (handphone = ‘mobile phone/cellphone’)

74 complete questionnaire sets were collected for analysis and the answers to the open-ended questions were coded by the author of this paper according to emerging themes and attitudes represented (see results).

All 74 participants were of South Korean nationality and specified Korean as their native language. Slightly more female (n=41) than male participants (n=33) participated in the survey. Most of the participants were university students aged between 19 and 30. Around 10% of the participants were older than 30 (mainly graduate students or early professionals). Students also indicated their major and can be classified as follows: humanities (n=35), economics and law (n=13), natural science (n=8), and social science and sports (n=2) (the numbers do not correspond to the complete number of students, since two participants were pursuing a mixed degree and thus could not be allocated to one faculty and one participant did not provide information on the study program). Of the 35 humanities students, 25 were pursuing a degree in education or English education. Other majors in this group included French or German language and literature. Students and early professionals were selected as general target population for this study, due to their close relationship to the English language and their intermediary status between younger generations and the working population of Korea. Participants estimated their English proficiency to be at the intermediate or

advanced level. Additionally, participants were asked to indicate how long they had been learning English. Only seven participants indicated having studied English for less than 5 years. 30 participants claimed to have studied English for 6 to 10 years, and 34 participants for even more than 10 years. The remaining three participants had studied English for 20 years or more. More than half of the participants had spent time abroad in an English-speaking country (e.g., studying abroad for one semester or simply travelling).

Spelling and grammar in the examples referenced in the following sections are left as they were given by the participants. If corrections were necessary, they are given in square brackets after the problematic passage. Participants are quoted in the following format: P45-M20. The letter-number combination before the dash is an internal identifier (i.e., in this case participant number 45), and the part after the dash indicates participant sex and age (M = male, F = female; i.e., in this case the participant was a 20-year-old male).

## 4 Results

### 4.1 Attitudes towards substantial English loanword use

Opinion on profuse English loanword usage was elicited by the straightforward question: ‘What do you think about Korean people who use many English loanwords when speaking Korean?’ The open-ended answers by the participants were coded and categorized into six groups as summarized in Table 2:

**Table 2.** Attitudes towards profound English loanword use

Group	Category	# of responses	%
1	mixed	29	39.19%
2	negative	20	27.03%
3	don't mind / don't care	8	10.81%
4	neutral	7	9.46%
5	positive	3	4.05%
6	no response	7	9.46%

Nearly 40% of participants expressed a mixed attitude towards people who use a high number of English loanwords when conversing in Korean (Group 1). There are some instances where the usage of English loanwords seems to be justified, for example, in academic contexts and when an appropriate native Korean or Sino-Korean word to express the same concept is unavailable. Excessive as well as unjustified usage or usage due to ‘wrong’ reasons (e.g., to look cool or to show off; as judged by the participants themselves), however, is frowned upon by this participant group or even castigated, as in (1).

(1) *I think it is okay when there is no other way to speak in Korean. However, if he/she use too much of it to show off, then it is a problem. He/she might think he/she is smart. For me, I don't want to hear them anymore then.* (P74-F23; emphasis added)

Excessive English loanword use is seen as a reason for participant 74 to terminate the conversation or at least to have the desire to do so. Participant 74 relates this to the feeling that the conversational partner might be ‘showing off’ and trying to appear ‘smart’ by the unwarranted use of English loanwords. According to her, Korean words should be used preferably and lapses to English loanwords are only acceptable when there is no adequate Korean word available.

Nearly a third of the participants showed a completely negative reaction towards heavy English loanword use in their answers and were accordingly assigned to Group 2. These answers often expressed overtly negative attitudes without any attempt of mitigation. Some of the participants asserted that people using many English loanwords appear to be arrogant or show-offs (a notion which was also frequently

mentioned by those who expressed a mixed attitude; of the 49 responses categorized as either mixed or negative, 27% perceived heavy English loanword users as show-offs), as can be exemplified by (2) and (3):

(2) *I think people who use many English loanwords are somehow arrogant and want to be smart person although he/she is not. If somebody use too much of English loanwords I feel aversion to such people.* (P63-M26)

(3) [...] *I think ‘Why does he say like that?’. And I think he’s kind of arrogant people.* (P19-F20)

In contrast to the previous group of participants, who thought that some contexts justify the use of English loanwords, the attitudes expressed here are negative through and through. To participant 63, everybody who uses too many English loanwords appears to be arrogant, demonstrating clearly a lack of intelligence that they are trying to cover up by their use of English words. Another opinion was that those people, for example, are not good Korean citizens since ‘[t]hey do not love korean’ (P10-M32).

Some participants explicitly stated that they either did not mind or did not care about heavy English loanword usage by Korean native speakers (Group 3). Other participants expressed a neutral opinion (Group 4). Answers were coded as neutral if they simply contained informative statements regarding English loanword use without expressing any overt or covert judgment. Participant 27, for example, merely referred to the fact that some people who use many English loanwords are overseas Koreans, which is neither assessed as positive nor negative:

(4) *I think people who use mant [many] English loanwords when speaking Korean are overseas Korean because overseas Koreans are using English loanwords so much.* (P27-M23)

Only three participants expressed a positive attitude towards heavy English loanword usage by native speakers of Korean. One of them (P45-M20) tentatively asserted that those people may ‘look smart a little’. Participant 20 (P20-F21) stated that she felt comfortable around people who exhibit this speech behavior.

## 4.2 Perceived reasons for English loanword use

The next questionnaire item inquired into perceived reasons for English loanword use. Since this was an open-ended question, responses had to be grouped and coded according to broad categories (see Table 3 below). Many participants expressed more than one reason, which led to the overall number of reasons recorded exceeding the number of questionnaire participants (74 online questionnaire participants provided 95 reasons). An overview of the categorization of all responses can be found in the following Table 3:

**Table 3.** Perceived reasons for English loanword use

Category	Examples	# of responses	%
practical reasons	convenience simplicity of usage and/or understanding necessity	29	30.53%
expressive reasons	display intelligence, English abilities, and/or educational attainment	21	22.11%
cultural reasons, globalization, historical reasons	Westernization of Korea necessity to express concept(s) from different culture	18	18.95%
habit	x	8	8.42%
mass media	Internet TV	6	6.32%
English practice, importance of English	x	5	5.26%
influence of time spent abroad	x	1	1.05%
no response		7	7.37%



Practical reasons were mentioned most often. The category of ‘practical reasons’ stands for convenience usage, the simplicity of using and/or understanding English loanwords, or the fact that some concepts are best expressed using an English loanword. There might also be no Korean counterpart and using an English loanword is, therefore, the only lexical option available to speakers. Two examples for responses coded as ‘practical reasons’ can be found below:

(5) *sometimes it [an English loanword] can be more helpful to express one's thought [thought].* (P59-F29)

(6) *It is because there are not enough Korean words to be used instead of the English loanwords.* (P64-F19)

As Participant 59's statement shows, English loanwords are sometimes perceived as being better suited to properly expressing one's thoughts than native Korean words. Participant 64 stresses that some Koreans seem to be forced to use English loanwords at least occasionally, due to lexical gaps in the native/Sino-Korean lexicon.

All reasons connected to the speakers' desire to create a certain impression of themselves were coded as expressive. According to the respondents, English loanword users want to leave a positive impression that is often associated with superior intelligence or education. Expressive reasons were altogether mentioned 21 times. Participant 49, for example, relates English loanword usage by Koreans to the obsession of learning English (so-called ‘English Fever’) and Participant 63 thinks that English loanwords are used as a means to demonstrate distinguished knowledge.

(7) *korean society is so obsessed with learning english [English] because having a good english ability has been a key to success during the past decades. so koreans tend to admire the person who speaks english well and it leads to awkward using of english loanwords.* (P49-F20)

(8) *[...] I think some people want to show there [their] level of knowledge and want to show off themselves. [...]* (P63-M26)

The desire to display advanced English proficiency, which goes hand in hand with superior knowledge, is interpreted as one reason for using English loanwords in this study. According to Participant 49, people with high English competence are in general admired by other Koreans. This is seen as responsible for making Koreans use English loanwords, even in contexts where this might appear ‘awkward’.

Other positive impressions which English loanword users might try to convey were described by questionnaire participants as ‘fancy’, ‘stylish’, and ‘cool’ (see (9) and (10)).

(9) *[...] for some people, it may seem to be nice and stylish that using a lot of English loanwords.* (P17-F24)

(10) *[...] We tend to think that its cool to use english loanwords..* (P2-F21)

Those statements show that using English when speaking Korean may be perceived as indicative that one is familiar with the language and evokes the association of a modern and fashionable person. A person using English loanwords can appear as a connoisseur of the English language and may seem to share the urbane connotations associated with it. It should be noted though that this is put into perspective by Participant 17 who states that this might be the case for ‘some people’, so there are also people who have a different opinion. Participant 2 also writes about a tendency (‘[w]e tend to think’) rather than an absolute sentiment expressed by Korean people.

Cultural and historical factors were also given as reasons for English loanword usage. Cultural and historical reasons, as well as globalization and Westernization, were combined into one coding category since it can often be difficult to distinguish between them (see, e.g., (11) below). All of the responses in this coding category referred to the influence of Western societies (especially U.S. American) on Korean society, culture, and language. This category is illustrated by the following example:

(11) *I think it's because we are living in 'westernized' modern society at this moment. Korea is industrialized and modernized country and this concept of development is from Western. I think it's why there are many English loanwords in Korea to describe words or concepts in our current life style.* (P48-F21)

Habitual reasons were only given a few times in the online questionnaire. Responses which gave habit or custom as the reason for the usage of English loanwords in Korean society were coded into this category. This type of reasoning is illustrated by the response of Participant 32:

(12) *I think people get accustomed to use English loanwords, so they use them unconsciously.* (P32-F21)

Surprisingly, influence by mass media was only mentioned six times as possible reason for English loanword usage, even though mass media have been shown to “actively participate in the induction of anglicisms” (Onysko 2007: 61) as well as multiplying the use of new words (Plümer 2000: 85). This view is only shared by a minority of the Korean student respondents, however, who see mass media influence (i.e., TV and/or the Internet) as the reason for many Koreans to use English loanwords. Another marginal reason for English loanword usage in Korean was the attempt to practice English or the importance of English in the Korean society (the first one being necessitated by the later, i.e., the importance of English in Korea makes it necessary for Koreans to practice English). In general, this is closely connected to the category of ‘expressive reasons’ and is consequently often mentioned in combination, as in (13).

(13) *The reason is because Korean people want to become a good Englisher [English speaker] and think English words including loanwords make people greater.* (P62-F27)

Influence of time spent abroad was only mentioned once as reason for using English loanwords:

(14) [...] *many Korean people have experience in foreign countries, for studying abroad or working there, and it would be easy for them to explain things in English sometimes.* (P67-M19)

### 4.3 Attitudes towards Konglish loanwords

In the online questionnaire, participants were then asked ‘What do you think about English loanwords which are considered to be Konglish?’ In order to clarify the term ‘Konglish’ to the subjects, the questionnaire provided the following two examples which are commonly recognized as Konglish items: ‘keon-ning’ (컨닝; from English ‘cunning’ = ‘cheating’) and ‘haen-deu-pon’ (핸드폰; from English ‘hand phone’ = ‘mobile phone/cellphone’). An overview of the response strategies can be found in the following Table 4:

**Table 4.** Attitudes towards Konglish loanwords

Group	Category	# of responses	%
1	negative	23	31.08%
2	neutral	14	18.92%
3	mixed	12	16.22%
4	positive	8	10.81%
5	no opinion	3	4.05%
6	no response	14	18.92%

Overall, opinions on this question varied widely. Nearly a third of the participants indicated a negative view of this special kind of English loanword and many expressed a desire to change Konglish loanwords into ‘proper’ Korean words. (15) and (16) are typical examples for responses expressing an overtly negative attitude towards Konglish loanwords:

(15) *I hate Konglish.* (P39-M19)

(16) *it sounds awkward so it has to be replaced with proper korean words. because those loanwords are neither kroean [Korean] nor english.* (P49-F20)

Participant 39 simply voices resentment towards Konglish, whereas Participant 49 provides us with reasons for her opinion: she dislikes Konglish loanwords because of their intermediary status. According to her, those words belong neither to the Korean nor to the English language, which results in a certain ‘awkwardness’ when using them. The main reasons for negative opinions, as stated by the participants, were related to problems in the acquisition of English resulting in obstacles in communicating with foreigners, as demonstrated in (17):

(17) *it would not be effective when we communicate with foreigners using that [Konglish] words.* (P42-M19)

The amount of semantic/lexical creativity that Konglish loanwords include is perceived as problematic when those words are transferred to English. If the interlocutor is unfamiliar with the usage of Konglish loanwords, these words can then pose a threat to mutual understanding. A Korean asking for a ‘sharp’, for example, is actually requesting a mechanical pencil. Using this Konglish loanword in an English conversation with a non-Korean English speaker might lead to confusion as the interlocutor might be unaware of the intended meaning of ‘sharp’.

Other participants posited a neutral statement as an answer to this questionnaire item. Those responses, although on the topic of Konglish loanwords, did not emphasize positive or negative aspects. Participant 45 and Participant 39, for example, expressed this kind of neutral statement towards Konglish loanwords.

(18) *It is just a cultural phenomenon in Korea, It's natural.* (P45-M20)

(19) *They are Korean words, although they are deprived [derived] from English.* (P39-M19)

In (18), Konglish loanwords are simply described as being ‘natural’ implying that there is nothing special about them. Example (19) merely explains what Konglish loanwords are in the eye of Participant 39: namely words stemming from English but belonging to the Korean language. Note that he does not acknowledge the semantic change that Konglish loanwords have undergone in the borrowing process.

A part of the responses expressed a mixed attitude towards Konglish loanwords, which means that they provided positive as well as negative views on the issue. Participants also offered different explanations for their responses. Some participants, see (20) below as an example, expressed the opinion that Konglish loanwords can be evaluated positively in a certain aspect, such as being useful or convenient, but should still be reduced in the future.

(20) *I think it is useful in someway. However, we really need to correct them. Soon, Korea will be more globalized and if we still use Konglish, it is not good for image of Korea.* (P74-F23)

Other participants have no problem with the usage of Konglish loanwords per se, but think that Konglish should only be used in Korea because using it in other countries and/or with foreigners can lead to communication problems:

(21) *It does not matter if we use Konglish words among Korean people but with people from other contexts, there will may be some misunderstanding because of the Konglish words.* (P34-F22)

The last response pattern coded as ‘mixed’ are answers positing that the general use of Konglish loanwords is acceptable but should be avoided if a ‘proper’ Korean word was available.

(22) *If we have another word to call [tell] it in Korean, it would be better.* (P43-F20)

A minority of responses expressed a positive attitude towards Konglish loanwords. The main reasons for a positive evaluation of Konglish loanwords were ‘cuteness’, ‘funniness’, and ‘convenience of usage’. Participant 1 valued Konglish loanwords for lingua-cultural reasons:

(23) *Good, it expresses our language history.* (P1-M29)

It should be noted that all participants who viewed Konglish loanwords positively had spent time in an English-speaking country (except two for which no response on the stay abroad question was available).

Last but not least, a few participants explicitly stated that they had no opinion on this matter and were therefore coded as ‘no opinion’.

## 5 Discussion

The prevalence of mixed attitudes towards the vigorous use of English loanwords (in general) expressed by the Korean participants of this study points to an active engagement with the linguistic situation in Korea and evokes a love-hate relationship to English loanwords similar to the one identified by Irwin (2011) in Japan. Most participants were well aware that it sometimes is indispensable to use an English loanword. This is also demonstrated by the frequent nomination of the ‘practical reasons’ response when prompted for reasons for English loanword usage. Nevertheless, using an abundance of unnecessary English loanwords (or what are at least perceived to be unnecessary loanwords) can lead to social stigmatization: the speaker can eventually appear as a show-off. Additionally, using many English loanwords is sometimes equated with bragging about one’s English proficiency. English competence is a very desirable skill in Korean society, but the linguistic situation in Korea very rarely calls for active English use. The use of English loanwords when speaking Korean is, therefore, one of the few possibilities to let fellow Koreans know about one’s ability to speak English (of course, using many English loanwords does not necessarily entail high English proficiency). Interestingly, according to the results of this study, using many English loanwords does not lead to admiration or even jealousy by the conversational partner. Instead the opposite reaction is achieved. This ties in with the observations made by Park (2009) regarding a Korean study group of English that “displaying one’s ability in English is constructed as an inherently problematic activity” (Park 2009: 184). Interactional situations that require a demonstration of one’s English competence are interactionally framed as problematic. This includes the use of discursual strategies such as sequential delay or embedding in an explicit negative assessment (Park 2009: 207). This contrasts with contexts where ability in another language than English is demonstrated. Park (2009, 201-211) found little to no interactional framing when it came to the display of competence in Japanese in his data. Of course, Japanese and English have a very different status in Korea. The business ties with Japan are not regarded as important as those with English-speaking countries and relatively few Korean people learn Japanese, especially compared to those afflicted by English Fever, leading to the sentiment that “Japanese is considered to be unimportant but easy, English is considered to be important but difficult” (Park 2009: 210). This shows that the interactional framing observed in displays of English ability seem to be not only a matter of face and politeness but depend on the context and the existence of different language ideologies regarding English and Japanese respectively (Park 2009: 211). As this study has shown that attitudes towards English loanwords correspond to the behavior displayed in Park’s (2009) study regarding displays of language proficiencies in general, it will be interesting to corroborate this further with research on the usage of and attitudes towards Japanese loanwords in Korean.

Konglish loanwords represent a creative process of semantic change. Their conscious usage demonstrates that (bilingual) speakers “are not just ‘copiers’ of forms, but that they also act as creative replicators of raw material” (Matras 2011: 175). This creativity is lost after the pseudo-loanwords are integrated into the Korean vocabulary, at least for non-bilingual speakers who use them without knowledge of their semantic peculiarities. Even though they could be seen as a pinnacle of linguistic creativity, they are often stigmatized

by the Korean speakers who regard them simply as wrong or faulty English. This leads to a desire to replace them with ‘proper’ Korean words. Nevertheless, participants in the survey did not always regard Konglish loanwords as problematic and there are indeed speakers who value them for their linguistic form (even though many of them modify their positive outlook by stating a preference for native Korean terms when available).

All three of Park’s (2009) identified ideologies of English in Korea are reflected in the results. As much as English in general is seen as necessary for Korean society (i.e., the ideology of necessitation), English loanwords are, to a certain degree, also seen as necessary and essential part of the Korean lexical system. However, they are identified as foreign matter and can produce certain ‘disturbances’ in the language system (i.e., reflecting the ideology of externalization). Self-deprecation (i.e., the notion of Koreans as being intrinsically unable to acquire English to a satisfying degree) is, to a certain extent, mirrored in the testimonies of the participants who claim that Konglish loanwords can be a problem for people unaware of the semantic shift involved in the borrowing of these English lexical items into Korean.

## 6 Conclusion

This study has shown that attitudes to English loanwords in Korea are neither simplistic nor homogeneous, at least in the surveyed group of university students and early professionals. It has to be emphasized that although negative attitudes were common, a small number of positive and many mixed reactions towards English loanword use were observed in the study. The dichotomy depicted by the partially overlapping and conflicting ideologies of English in Korea (Park 2009) can also be found in the attitudes identified in the data. The active engagement of the participants with the subject matter at hand (as shown by the differentiated attitudes towards English loanwords, see discussion) shows that this topic is highly relevant in Korean society and, as such, is of high interest for not only researchers but also educators in this area.

The complexity of the matter calls for further active scholarly engagement with the subject of English loanwords in Korea, not least to extend this research to other demographic groups. As this study has focused on the attitudes towards loanwords and their use, further research regarding the actual use of English loanwords by Korean speakers needs to be conducted in order to complete the picture of Anglicisms in Korea (corpus-based quantitative studies are just one possibility here). As attitudes are intrinsically hard to measure, one of the main drawbacks of this study is typical for attitudinal studies: the use of self-reported data. The possibility that participants were not telling the truth or were simply reporting what they thought were socially acceptable answers cannot be excluded. However, the participants were aware that the researcher herself was not Korean and thus the social pressure might have been lower than could theoretically be expected. Nevertheless, it would be interesting to support the self-reported answers with other means of data collection, for example, naturally occurring conversations between peers about language and language use. As, however, the goal of this study was to present an overview of attitudes connected to loanword use and not survey actual usage patterns, it is sufficient to keep these limitations in mind and consider them for future studies in the field.

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