

Old vs. young Koreans' vowel insertion after word-final English and French postvocalic plosives: A sociolinguistic account

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In a recent data survey, the comparison of the 2011 data to the early 1990s data for English and French loans in Korean adaptation has revealed that the overall frequency of final vowel insertion and that of variable insertion and/or no vowel insertion after the word-final postvocalic plosives [b d g p t k] are significantly decreased and increased, respectively, no matter whether the plosives are English or French (Figure 1). In order to explore whether there is a generational difference in vowel insertion in Korean adaptation of the L2 plosives in relation to the data survey, we conducted a perception experiment on old and young Koreans' vowel insertion. Under the assumption that the 1990s data presumably includes loanwords from speakers born mainly between 1930 and 1960, while the 2011 database presumably includes loanwords from speakers born up to about 20 years later, 40 Koreans who were born before 1960 and another 40 Koreans who were born after 1989 were recruited in the experiment with 20 male and 20 female subjects in each group. The average age of the old group is 59.6 years old and that of the young group 21.9 years old.

The results of our experiment have shown that it is after the word-final English and French postvocalic [b d g p t k] that the young and old Korean groups are different in vowel insertion, regardless of whether the plosives are released or unreleased. Statistical results revealed that when the plosives are released (Figure 2a), the young and old groups have a significant difference in vowel insertion after English and French word-final released plosives [$t = 2.267, p = 0.023$]. That is, young group has no difference in vowel insertion after the plosives, while old group has significantly more vowel insertion after French released plosives than after English counterparts. When the plosives are unreleased (Figure 2b), there is also a significant difference in vowel insertion after the plosives between young and old groups [$t = -2.329, p = 0.020$]. This means that young group has no difference in vowel insertion after English and French unreleased plosives, whereas old group has a significant difference in vowel insertion after them with more vowel insertion after English unreleased plosives than French counterparts.

From the results, we propose that the generational difference in vowel insertion after the non-native plosives is explained by a sociolinguistic account that language contact differences over time can play a role in loanword adaptation. To be specific, due to the increased direct contact with English which has been a dominant foreign language in the Korean society, young Koreans have more access to its spoken usages than two decades ago, perceiving a word-final English postvocalic plosive more as a coda with no vowel insertion. However, due to the significant decline in French education than two decades ago (Figure 3), young Koreans are more likely to perceive word-final French postvocalic plosives like their English counterparts in vowel insertion. As a result, the young group has no difference in vowel insertion after word-final English and French plosives, no matter whether they are released or unreleased and no matter whether they are voiced or voiceless, though word-final French plosives are released in the source language (e.g. Tranel 1987). However, our old group who had been exposed more to French in their secondary education than the young group has a difference in vowel insertion after English and French plosives.

To conclude, the old vs. young Koreans' difference in vowel insertion after word-final English and French postvocalic plosives suggests the role of sociolinguistic environments over time (e.g. Haugen 1950; Weinreich 1968; Labov 1972; Poplack, Sankoff and Miller 1988; Hualde 1993; Smith 2006) rather than a phonological or phonetic view in loanword adaptation.

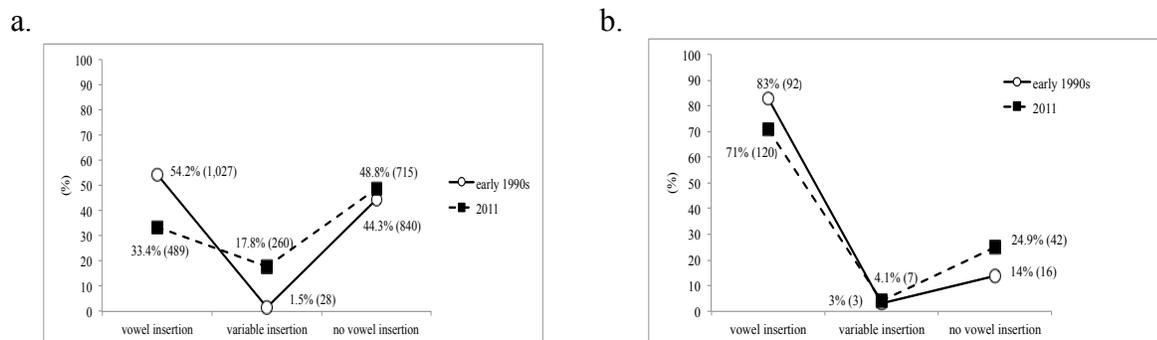


Figure 1. The comparison of overall frequency of vowel insertion after word-final (a) English and (b) French postvocalic plosives [b d g p t k] in the early 1990s and 2011 data.

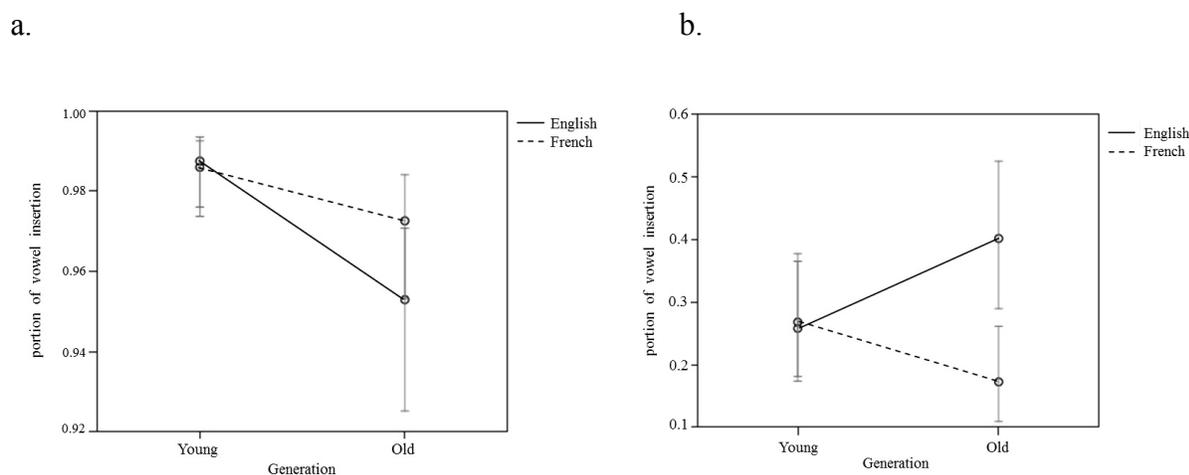


Figure 2. Portion of vowel insertion in the interaction of Generation (Young and Old) and Language (English and French) when the word-final English and French postvocalic plosives are (a) released and (b) unreleased.

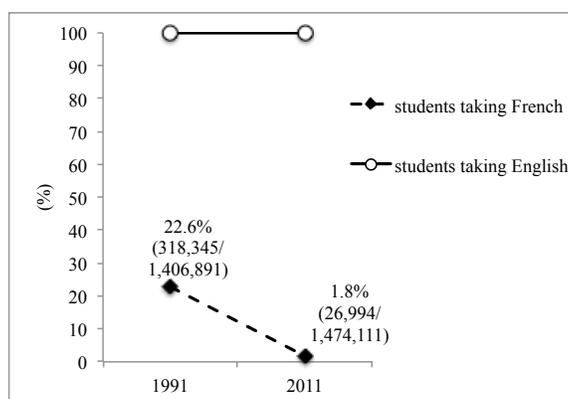


Figure 3. The comparison of general high school students taking English and French (based on the data from the Korean Educational Statistics Service).