The development of a loanword: the interaction of frequency and grammar in Dutch loanword integration in Indonesian

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The borrowing of a loanword through perception or otherwise is just the beginning of its lifecycle in the borrowing language. In the initial stage, many loanwords do not readily adapt to the phonology of the borrowing language: its structure may not fit and/or phonological rules may not apply to it. Gradually, a loanword may integrate into the phonology or the phonology may adopt loanword structures and loanword-specific rules or constraints. Which factors play a role in loanword integration? We apply this question to Dutch loanwords in Indonesian and show that both grammar and frequency effects determine loanword nativization.

We reinvestigate a well-known phonological rule in Indonesian: coalescence (or fusion of two sounds). In loanwords, coalescence variably occurs. We present evidence for the following related observations. First, loanword integration is gradual—similar to lexical diffusion in language change. Second, coalescence in Dutch loanwords in Indonesian is variable but systematic and predictable, e.g. particular non-native phonotactic structures block coalescence. Third, lexical frequency contributes to the likelihood of the application of coalescence. Finally, lexical frequency interacts with the different sounds involved in coalescence.

Phonological grammar and language use have been widely studied but largely independent of each other. This study shows that grammar and language use should be studied in tandem in particular cases. These intricate interactions of grammar and lexical frequency call for an amalgamate account of both grammar and lexicon. We account for the data in a hybrid Optimality-Exemplar Theoretical model.