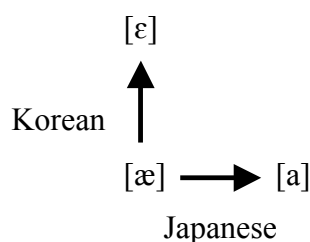


The role of perceived similarity and contrast: English loanwords into Korean and Japanese

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Loanword adaptation patterns provide much insight into language-specific aspects of the native phonology of a recipient language. On the other hand, there is ample evidence for the role of perception in loanword phonology. In particular, Steriade (2001) develops the P-map theory that speakers tend to maximize the perceptual similarity between segments, which serves to constrain loanword adaptation (Yip 2002, Kang 2003, Kenstowicz 2003, among others). Probably, the auditory capacity and the perceptual mapping are fundamentally language universal. Yet, the P-map may be “tuned” by language-specific experience (Steriade 2001, Johnson 2004).

The objective of this study is to explore the role of perceptual similarity, modified by language-specific phonetic details, in accounting for adaptation patterns. Specifically, distinct repair strategies in adopting the low front vowel [æ] in English into Korean and Japanese are compared. It is known that Korean adopts the vowel [æ] as [ɛ] whereas Japanese adopts it as [a]. As the phonetic contrast between /ɛ/ and /a/ in both languages is extremely similar, it is not obvious where this difference comes from.



In order to account for this difference, an identification test was conducted. By testing stimuli in which formant frequencies were manipulated, it was found that speakers of the languages investigated perceive the input vowel [æ] differently; while [æ] was perceived pervasively as [ɛ] by Korean speakers, it was identified as [a] by Japanese speakers. This result provides support for the role of perceived similarity in loanword adaptation. The distinct perception patterns are in part attributed to language-specific variations in vowel distribution.

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