

## The morphophonological formation of the suffix *-la* in Korean

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**Purpose and claim:** This study aims to account for the morphophonological formation of *-la*, which has emerged as an “agentive” suffix quite recently in Korean. I claim that the English vowel-initial “demonym” suffix *-er* ‘person from X’ has been borrowed and reanalyzed as *-la* in Korean, based on the derivative *saul-la* ‘person from Seoul’. This has become productive, as in *cipaŋ-la* ‘person from any place other than Seoul’. The onset consonant of *-la* is explicated in terms of morphological copy epenthesis of the final consonant of the stem *saul* ‘Seoul’ in order to mark a morpheme boundary between the stem and the suffix. As opposed to phonological epenthesis that occurs to repair marked structures, such as vowel hiatus, morphological epenthesis is motivated to demarcate morphemes, at the expense of phonological optimization that favors the CV structure.

**Overview:** Korean has a variety of agentive suffixes, such as *-in* and *-ca*, that are attached to noun stems to add the meaning ‘person’ (e.g., *tiŋsan-in* ‘climber’, *poŋsa-ca* ‘volunteer’). In addition to these Sino-Korean agentive suffixes, *-la* has emerged as an innovative agentive suffix quite recently and is widely used in a casual and colloquial register. For example, while *tiŋsan-la* ‘climber’ is not observed at all in the Sejong Corpora of Korean (0 results), whether written or spoken, it is found enormously in a Google search (about 459,000 results). Despite its prevalence, the innovative suffix *-la* has been understudied in morphophonology, but Lee (2017) has recently opened a discussion of this suffix in an allomorphic approach: *-la* is originated from the English derivational suffix *-er* ‘person who does X’ and [l̩] is an allomorph of [l̩]. According to Lee, the [l̩]~[l̩] alternation is determined by the origin of noun stems: [l̩] is attached to English-based nouns (e.g., *pillok-l̩* ‘blogger’), while [l̩] is attached elsewhere, regardless of the final sound of a base. However, the actual phonological and morphological distribution of the suffix *-la* is even wider than Lee’s observation (1).

- |     |    |                  |   |                              |                                 |
|-----|----|------------------|---|------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| (1) | a. | <i>saul-in</i>   | ~ | <i>saul-la</i>               | ‘person from Seoul’             |
|     | b. | <i>tiŋsan-in</i> | ~ | <i>tiŋsan-la</i>             | ‘climber’                       |
|     | c. | <i>poŋsa-ca</i>  | ~ | <i>poŋsa-la</i>              | ‘volunteer’                     |
|     | d. | N/A              | ~ | <i>cikak-la</i>              | ‘person who is late’            |
|     | e. | N/A              | ~ | <i>chik<sup>h</sup>in-la</i> | ‘person who eats/likes chicken’ |

Phonologically, *-la* is so productive that it can appear after any consonant or vowel (1a-e), which is in agreement with Lee’s observation. Morphologically, however, Lee’s allomorphic approach (*-l̩* after English-based nouns, while *-la* elsewhere) is not always the case. In fact, *-la* is attached to noun stems of any origin: not only to Korean nouns (1a-d), but also to loanwords from English (1e). More strikingly, *-la* can make derived forms of any noun stem, although there is no canonical counterpart (N/A) (1d-e). Thus, it appears the innovative suffix *-la* is a bullfrog, which aggressively competes with the native frogs (*-in* and *-ca*) in the ecological system of morphophonology.

**Puzzle:** It is unclear where the initial consonant [l̩] of the innovative suffix *-la* comes from and why it is motivated. Lee claims that this comes from the derived forms of /l̩/-final bases followed by *-er*, because <l̩> appears twice when written in Korean orthography, as in <honsul-l̩> but not as in <honsul-l̩> ‘person who drinks alone’. However, there seems to be no independent evidence that the phonological property of final /l̩/ but not any other final sound, particularly in relation to orthography, leads leveling in derivation. If that were the case, other English vowel-initial suffixes would be invariably borrowed into Korean with an onset /l̩/. Yet, *-ism*, for example, is not borrowed as *-licim* in Korean despite the presence of /l̩/-final stems in English (e.g., *real-ism*, *journal-ism*), but as the vowel-initial form *-icim* (e.g., *kwic<sup>h</sup>an(h)-icim* ‘lazy-ism (laziness)’).

**Proposal:** I propose that the formation of  $-l\lambda$  is based not on the peculiar property of the final-consonant /l/ in written Korean, but on the way how native Korean speakers adopt the demonym ('person from X') of the presumably frequent proper noun *Seoul*, as in *New York-er*. According to Kim and Repetti's (to appear) phonological generalizations of demonym formation in English, it is less likely that the demonym suffix *-er* is attached to a place name that ends in a liquid (e.g., *?Seattle-er*), due to the Obligatory Contour Principle (Leben 1973), which prohibits two adjacent liquids ( $l, \lambda$ ) across morphemes. It is thus expected that the English output form of 'person from Seoul' should be *Seoul-ite* rather than *Seoul-er*, and this was supported by a Google search in English: *Seoul-ite* (88.95%) vs. *Seoul-er* (11.05%). However, it appears that Korean speakers have adopted *Seoul-er* (43.90%) almost as often as *Seoul-ite* (56.10%) (Figure 1). In fact, *Seoul-ite* searched in most cases in Korean was not even a demonym but the name of a YouTube channel, a café, or a restaurant. This supports Korean speakers' strong preference for *-er* to *-ite* when it comes to the demonym suffix. Also, it is likely that the demonym suffix *-er* (1a) has undergone semantic conflation with the homophonous agentive suffix *-er* (1b-e).

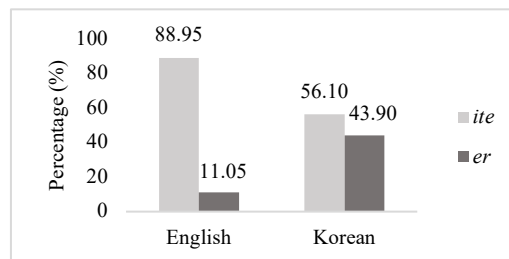


Figure 1 Percentage (%) of *-ite* and *-er* attached to 'Seoul' in English and in Korean

I argue against the previous allomorphic approach but for a morphological epenthetic approach in two aspects: 1) The epenthetic **quality** [l] is neither default nor unmarked, such as glottal stop, which is often the case for phonological consonant epenthesis (e.g., [ʔis.maq] 'listen' in Arabic, Lombardi 2002). I claim that [l] is rather a copy of the adjacent consonant (final /l/ of the stem *Seoul*) in [sʌ.u.l.lʌ]. 2) Regarding **position** and **motivation**, morphological epenthesis occurs between morphemes, but not in intervocalic position, as phonological epenthesis does to repair vowel hiatus. If epenthesis did not occur, output forms would be phonologically less marked and thus more optimal with no coda (\*[sʌ.u.lʌ]). However, the consonant /l/ is copied and epenthesized to mark a boundary between morphemes to achieve a match between the morpheme (stem) boundary and the syllable boundary, via ALIGN (Stem, R, σ, R) at the expense of NOCODA and DEP-C (2), which distinguishes the innovative suffix  $-l\lambda$  from the pre-existing suffixes *-in* and *-ca*. Morphological copy epenthesis is supported by examples from different languages, such as the Jeju dialect of Korean (Jung 1997, Kang 2002) (3a) and Italian (Repetti 2009) (3b).

(2)	/sʌu]_lʌ/	ALIGN (Stem, R, σ, R)	NOCODA	DEP-C
a.	[sʌ.u.lʌ]	*!		
b.	[sʌ.u.l.lʌ]		*	*

- (3) a. Jeju Korean: /kacuk-os/ [kacukkot] 'leather clothes'  
 b. Italian: /tram-elettrico/ [trammelettrico] 'electric tram'

This study provides a morphophonological account of the Korean agentive suffix  $-l\lambda$ . The analysis is unique since it sheds light on the form that has emerged recently in Korean and contributes to a crosslinguistic discussion of morphological epenthesis (e.g., Repetti 2012, Kim 2018).

**References:** Jung. 1997. Phoneme sequences and non-phonological boundaries. Kang. 2002. Edge-integrity and the syllable structure in Korean. Kim. 2018. Variation in stem-final consonant clusters in Korean nouns. Kim & Repetti. To appear. Démonym suffixes in English. Leben. 1973. Suprasegmental phonology. Lee. 2017. Allomorphic variation of English noun derivational suffix *-er* in Korean. Lombardi. 2002. Coronal epenthesis and markedness. Repetti. 2012. Consonant-final loanwords and epenthetic vowels in Italian.