

A Phonological Analysis of English Brand Name Pronunciations by Indonesian, Japanese, and Korean Speakers: A Study of World Englishes

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to analyze the phonological adaptation patterns in the pronunciation of English brand names by native speakers of Indonesian, Japanese, and Korean. This study distinct from the phenomenon of globalization and the expansion of international brands, which provide phonological issues, Particular when foreign words must be adapted to the phonological system of the mother tongue (L1). by Using a qualitative approach and descriptive phonological analysis, the data were collected from the pronunciation of famous brands by speakers from the three language groups. The findings indicate that segmental and suprasegmental adaptations are heavily influenced by the phonotactic structure of each L1. Japanese and Korean speakers typically use epenthesis and simplify segments to maintain the dominant CV syllable structure, whereas Indonesian speakers are more flexible and frequently to keep the original sounds Furthermore, stress and intonation in speech show changes that match L1 prosody patterns. Sociolinguistic factors such as brand proximity also influence the level of adaption. This research increases the understanding of pronunciation variance in the context of World Englishes and gives implications for foreign language pronunciation education as well as interlingual phonology studies.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In today's globalized environment, English remains the dominating language for international communication, trade, and branding. One of the most visible manifestations of this phenomenon is the widespread use of English brand names like Nike, Gucci, and Starbucks, which are recognized and spoken by linguistically varied groups. However, depending on the phonological systems of the speakers' first languages (L1), many brand names are pronounced very differently. One of the key characteristics of what are commonly referred to as World Englishes is the dynamic interaction between English and regional languages, which is highlighted by this variant. The term "World Englishes" was initially proposed by Kachru (1985) to recognize the globalization of English and the emergence of several regional variants impacted by sociocultural and linguistic variables. Pronunciation serves as one of the most noticeable indicators of linguistic variation. It is shaped by a combination of factors, including syllable structure, stress assignment, and then native phonological patterns. These phonetic aspects contribute to the distinct ways English is spoken by individuals from different linguistic backgrounds. Chu (2022) and Joshi (2023) mention that English's flexibility has helped it spread globally while also giving rise

to a wide range of accents, sound patterns, and usage habits in different parts of the world. One clear way to notice these variations is by looking at how people pronounce brand names. Unlike general vocabulary, brand names tend to remain unchanged across languages, which makes them especially useful for examining how pronunciation and perception shift in different linguistic settings. Their strong marketing and identity value also makes them highly recognizable, allowing researchers to trace how local speech patterns influence the way they are spoken. However, when faced with phonological components that are foreign to their own language, non-native speakers of English frequently adjust their pronunciation by substituting consonants, inserting vowels, or realigning stresses.

These changes, while sometimes viewed as errors, are in fact systematic strategies employed to integrate foreign phonological elements into native speech norms. Pronunciation differences, influenced by region-specific phonological rules, clearly illustrate how language evolves across communities. According to Chu (2022) and Joshi (2023), English's flexibility as a global language has not only supported its widespread adoption, but also given rise to a wide array of accents, distinctive sound systems, and regionally specific usage norms. Among the many ways to observe these variations, brand names stand out due to their high recognizability and strong marketing influence. This finding not only contributes to the development of phonological theory in second language learning but also provides useful insights for practical understanding in brand strategies within multicultural markets, as well as supporting English language teaching that takes into account the phonological diversity of its learners.

1.1 Theoretical Framework

Theoretical Framework The concept of World Englishes was introduced by Braj Kachru (1985), emphasizing that English is no longer confined to native-speaking countries but also has become a global language with many local variations. Braj Kachru's 1985 model of World Englishes categorizes English users into three circles: the INNER CIRCLE (native users), OUTER CIRCLE (institutionalized varieties), and EXPANDING CIRCLE (dependent on external norms), highlighting the sociolinguistic contexts of English's global spread. (Kachru, 2006). In the Expanding Circle, English is used as a foreign language but still exhibits unique local variations. As in the article, Al-Mutairi (2020) explains that the Inner Circle presents countries where English is the main language and is used in everyday life and in government institutions, such as the United States, Great Britain, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. The Outer Circle includes countries that have British colonial relations, and English is widely used in social life or in the government sector. Most of the countries included in this circle are former colonies of the British Empire, such as India, Malaysia, Singapore, Ghana, Kenya, and etc. The use of English in these countries is English as a second language. Finally, the Expanding Circle includes countries that introduce English as a foreign language in education, especially for the purpose of communicating in English with the Inner and Outer Circles. These countries include Turkey, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Japan, China, Korea, and others.

1.2 Phonological Variation and L1 Interference

The two main problems with learning a second language (L2) are phonological variation and interference from the first language (L1). Phonological patterns from their mother tongue are frequently transferred by learners, which causes systematic errors and variability in L2 speech. Differences in the production and usage of sounds within a language or between speakers of a language are referred to as phonological variation. This variance is a normal aspect of spoken language and can be impacted by contextual, social, or regional factors. Furthermore, mispronunciations of vowels, diphthongs, consonants, and allophonic variations are examples of phonological variation in L1 interference. (Saputra and Syafutri, 2021).

And here, there are 3 types and patterns of phonological variation. for The first is sound change and alternation: Phonological variation can involve changes such as deletion, substitution, or insertion of sounds. For example, in Italian, unstressed syllables are more likely to undergo changes such as vowel deletion or consonant simplification, while stressed syllables are more stable. (Schettino & Cutugno, 2025) Both Dialectal and Regional: Different dialects or varieties of a language may have different phonological patterns. For example, Latin American Spanish dialects show variations in the pronunciation of certain consonants and vowels, influenced by historical and social factors. (Jajo-Yacoub & Ramirez, 2023). And for contextual and social is that variation can be influenced by factors such as age, education, gender, and socioeconomic status. In multilingual communities, these social factors influence how people use and perceive different sound patterns. (Shen, 2023).

In the theoretical perspective, variationists argue that phonological variation is not just random "performance" errors but also can be systematic and part of a speaker's linguistic competence. They emphasize the need to analyze and explain the conditions that govern when and how variation occurs. (Chen, Lee, Luo, Lai, Cheung, & Nazzi, 2020).

There are three main ways to explain how L1 (first language) interferes with L2 (sacnd language, in this case english). The first is the transfer of temporal and articulatory patterns, which refers to how speakers move their articulatory arrangements (position and movement of speech organs like the tongue and lips) and pronunciation timing habits (like sound duration) from L1 to L2. (Beristain, 2023) Example: Spanish speakers who are already fluent in English may still carry over their nasalization and adaptation of Spanish sounds. While

they may be able to mimic native pronunciation, their success depends on how well they adapt their articulatory timing and position strategies to fit English patterns. So the better they adapt, the more natural their English pronunciation will be. Rhythmic and segmental influences, namely the speech rhythm (stress patterns and sound duration) from L1, are also often carried over to L2. (Kawase, Davis, & Kim). Example: Japanese has a more uniform rhythm and less variation in vowel and consonant duration. When speakers speak English, the Japanese often tend to maintain the rhythmic patterns in Japanese. As a result, their pronunciation may sound less natural to native English speakers due to the more varied rhythm of English. Allophonic Patterns and Position. Some second language (L2) sounds, such as English /l/, has many variations in pronunciation depending on their position in the word (initial, medial, or final). If the speaker's first language does not distinguish between these, they are less likely to acquire these variations. (Colontoni, Kochetov, & Steele, 2023). Example: French and Spanish don't have much variation in /l/. When speakers of these languages learn English, they have difficulty distinguishing and producing /l/ sound in the correct position for the example is line in word "light" vs. "ball". This shows the influence of L1 phonological patterns on L2 sound production.

1.3 English Brand Name as Linguistic Data

English Brand Name as Linguistic Information Brand names are visual and linguistic creations whose identity is impacted by typographic designs. Onomization, or transforming a word into a proper name, entails morphological, phonological, and semantic changes that are frequently reinforced by visual design elements. (Dübbert, 2021). In addition, brand names provide an authentic and consistent context for phonological analysis. Because brand names such as "Dior", "Starbucks", "Armani" and etc. are so well known, their pronunciation offers a rich site for studying how English is spoken globally. These words also often contain sounds that are unfamiliar or difficult to pronounce in some first languages (L1), making them ideal for analyzing phonological adaptation. Phonetic elements (specific sounds in brand names) can convey certain meanings or impressions to the listener. This can be called sound symbolism, which is a non-arbitrary relationship between sound and meaning. To analyze meaning, we must use three dimensions of semantic differential, namely evaluation (good-bad), potential (strong-weak), and activity (active-passive). (Motoki, Park, Pathak, & Spence, 2022).

2. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The findings in this analysis indicate a consistent pattern of phonological adaptation among Korean, Japanese, and Indonesian speakers in pronouncing foreign-language brand names. This adaptation process is mainly influenced by the phonological system and syllable structure in each group's mother tongue (L1). In general, all groups tend to adapt the phonological form of loanwords to fit the phonotactic rules of their language, with different strategies. and this is the findings from Korean speakers, Japanese speakers, and Indonesian speakers:

Brand Name	Korean Speakers	Japanese Speakers	Indonesian Speakers
UNIQLO	[yu.ni.k ^h u.ro], /kl/ → [ku.ri], stress initial	[yu.ni.ku.ro], CV preference, flat pitch	[u.ni.ku.lo], /j/ → [y], equal stress
ZARA	[ja.ra]/[sa.ra], /z/ → [ɟ]/[s], /r/ → [r]	[za.ra], /z/ → [d͡z], /r/ → [r]	[za.ra], /z/ retained or [s]
STARBUCKS	[su.ta.pa.ku.su], epenthesis, initial stress	[su.ta.ba.ku.su], CV strict, vowel insertion	[sə.tar.bak], epenthesis, flat stress
HERMES	[e.me.su], /ɛər/ → [e], avoid coda	[e.ru.me.su], added vowels	[her.mes], native-like vowel, no diphthong
ARMANI	[a.ma.ni], /r/ → [r] or deleted	[a.ra.ma.ni], resyllabification	[ar.ma.ni], /r/ retained or rolled
GUCCI	[ku.tei], /g/ → [k], /tʃ/ → [tɕ ^h]	[gu.tei], minimal change, pitch-accent	[gu.ci], /tʃ/ → [c]/[ɟ], flat/final stress

Brand Name	Korean Speakers	Japanese Speakers	Indonesian Speakers
YSL	[ibu.saŋ.lo.rum], nasal vowels adapted	[i.bu.sa.n.ro.ran.to], nasal loss, epenthesis	[if.san.lo.ren], nasal → [an]
DIOR	[di.or]/[di.o.ru], final /r/ softened	[di.o.ru], vowel insertion, pitch stress	[di.or]/[di.yor], flat or initial stress
CALVIN KLEIN	[kal.bin.k ^h u.ra.in], /v/ → [b]	[ka.ru.bi.n.ku.ra.i.n], /v/ → [b], diphthong split	[kal.fin.klain], /v/ → [f]/[p]
CHANEL	[ʃa.nel], /ʃ/ → [ɕ], schwa → [ʌ]	[sha.ne.ru], CV, pitch-accent	[sa.nel], /ʃ/ → [s], flat stress

2.1 Segmental Adaptation

Korean and Japanese speakers show a strong tendency to avoid voiced consonants in word-initial positions. For example, the sound /g/ in GUCCI is often pronounced as [k] sound by Korean speakers and as [q̥] (voiceless) by Japanese speakers. Meanwhile, Indonesian speakers tend to maintain the original segmentals such as /g/, /tʃ/, or /v/, although there are variations such as changes in /v/ to [f] or [p]. In addition, final consonants such as /r/ and /s/ sound are often avoided by Korean and Japanese speakers through the addition of epenthetic vowels, while Indonesian speakers tend to retain or minimally adapt them.

2.2 Syllable Structure

The difference in syllable structure greatly influences adaptation. Japanese and Korean are very restrictive in syllable structure and prefer CV (consonant-vowel) patterns. This causes extensive epenthesis processes such as in STARBUCKS which is adapted into [su.ta.ba.ku.su] (Japanese) and [su.ta.pa.ku.su] (Korean). Indonesian speakers, although more flexible towards final consonants, also show a tendency to insert vowels to avoid consonant clusters, such as in STARBUCKS becoming [sə.tar.bak].

2.3 Stress and Prosody

In terms of syllable stress, the three groups generally do not maintain English or French stress patterns. Japanese and Korean speakers rely on relatively flat intonation or pitch-accent patterns, while Indonesian speakers tend to show even stress or shift to the final syllable, because Indonesian does not have a strong lexical stress system.

2.4 Phonological Strategies

Some common strategies observed are:

- Epenthesis, is Often used by Japanese and Korean speakers to avoid consonant clusters and final consonants. so they are always use consonat-vowel (CV) structure.
- Segment simplification is Seen in the replacement of /tʃ/ with [tɕ] or [c], and /r/ with [ɾ] or omission.
- Avoidance of diphthongs, from All three group tend to break diphthongs into two separate vowels (e.g. /aɪ/ becomes [a.i]). Preservation of CV structure: Generally seen strongly in Japanese and Korean speakers, and quite often adapted by Indonesian speakers.

2.5 Influence of Language Prestige and Familiarity

Some brands such as UNIQLO and GUCCI show a more "uniform" adaptation among speakers due to their presence in the local market and their proximity to their respective L1 phonology (UNIQLO is a Japanese brand). This suggests that familiarity and exposure factors also influence how "foreign" a word sounds, and thus determine how much phonological modification is required.

This chapter has presented the phonological findings on how Indonesian, Japanese, and Korean speakers pronounce English brand names. The analysis reveals clear patterns of phonological adaptation influenced by each group's native phonotactic constraints.

Indonesian speakers, whose language allows for a wider variety of syllable structures including final consonants and consonant clusters, generally show the closest approximations to the original English pronunciations. Japanese and Korean speakers, in contrast, frequently modify the syllable structure through vowel epenthesis, particularly at word-final positions, to conform to their languages' CV (consonant-vowel) syllable patterns. These strategies often result in the insertion of vowels (e.g., [u] or [ʊ]) and simplification or deletion of final consonants.

In terms of stress, English lexical stress is typically preserved or closely approximated by Indonesian speakers, while it is neutralized or flattened in Korean and Japanese pronunciations due to the syllable-timed nature and pitch accent system, respectively, of those languages. The data supports the concept of World

Englishes, where localized phonological adaptations are natural outcomes of language contact and serve as valuable indicators of how English is nativized in different linguistic communities.

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