Easy decoding yet difficult encoding: What does the asymmetry between reading and writing in Korean Hangul mean for grapholinguistics?

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The Korean writing system, Hangul, is known to be a script that is (exceptionally) easy to learn to read (Pae, 2020), which is borne out by anecdotal and pragmatic evidence. At the segmental level, each segment has only one sound, which makes Hangul qualify for a shallow orthography. At the syllabic level, a consistent blending scheme of a consonant and a vowel produces systemized syllable types (i.e., CV, CVC, and CVCC). These scriptal characteristics of Hangul promote emergent readers' *learnability* and skilled readers' *efficiency*. However, spelling in Hangul is extremely complicated. In this light, this paper discusses the asymmetry between decoding (word recognition) and encoding (spelling) in the Korean writing system.

When it was invented in the 15th century by King Sejong, the Korean writing system was a purely phonetic script such that written words could be directly sounded out and that speech could be directly written down. Resulting from language drift, particularly phonological changes, during the 16th century through the 19th century without a top-down regulation, however, the disparity between phonology and orthography in both spoken language and written language was insurmountable. To address the gap between phonology and orthography, Korean linguists reformed the orthography by changing from a phonetic script to a compromised morphology-infused script. A few more orthographic reforms have taken place in modern days.

The asymmetry in Hangul has pragmatic implications in general and grapholinguistic implications in particular. The pragmatic implications involve the fact that, although decoding in Hangul is easy, the majority of the Korean public is unable to spell Korean words correctly (i.e., high incidents of typographical errors). The grapholinguistic implications point toward a pressing desideratum for a functional theory of writing that is suitable for Hangul to address the gap. This is consistent with Meletis' (2020) call for a reevaluation of theoretical grapholinguistics.

Meletis, D. (2020). *The nature of writing: A theory of grapholinguistics.* Brest: Fluxus Editions.

Pae, H. K. (2020). *Script effects as the hidden drive of the mind, cognition, and culture.* New York, NY: Springer International Publishing.