

# Multilingual Wordplay in Contemporary Korean: Homonymy at the Crossroads of Written and Oral Language

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In contemporary Korean, mixed writing system can be observed: *Hangŭl*, the Korean phonetic alphabet system (invented in 15<sup>th</sup> century) is combined with Latin and Chinese characters.

Until recently, educated Koreans used a mixed writing with *Hangŭl* and Chinese characters (for nouns). However, in the 1990s, Chinese characters gradually disappeared from the press and academic books and the *Hangŭl* became widespread. After the military dictatorships, with the language policy focusing on English, more and more English words have been used in both oral and written language. At the same time, despite the neglect of the teaching of Chinese characters at school, the addition of “Classical Chinese” to university entrance examination as optional choice with second foreign languages, as well as their need in labor market, give them an importance back. Therefore many children learn Chinese characters in private lessons.

In this context a mixed writing system reappears, this time with English too, and often for a purpose of wordplay: *Hangŭl* and Chinese characters or *Hangŭl* and Latin characters. These multilingual wordplays are met especially in titles of press articles, in commercials or movie titles. The frame is in *Hangŭl* and the Latin or Chinese characters are often only a syllable within a word or a phrase. The whole word, pronounced in Korean (oral aspect) gives a meaning. The part written in Latin or Chinese characters, visible only in written support, gives a second meaning. Both meanings obtained by the homonymy combine each other and form a more complex message in an economic and playful way.

This paper aims to show this new special wordplay feature through various examples and to analyze their linguistic mechanism.

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