PHONOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF BORROWED WORDS AND NEOLOGISMS IN ENGLISH ORAL SPEECH

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Abstract. *The present study investigates the phonological characteristics of borrowed words and neologisms in contemporary English oral speech. As English continues to expand globally, it integrates lexical items from a wide range of languages while simultaneously generating new words driven by technological advancement, digital communication, and sociocultural change. These lexical innovations enter spoken English with varying degrees of phonological adaptation. Through a descriptive and analytical approach, this research examines key phonological processes—segmental substitution, stress shift, syllabic reduction, cluster simplification, prosodic assimilation, and pronunciation variability—observed in the oral use of loanwords and neologisms. The study demonstrates that borrowed words undergo gradual nativization influenced by English phonotactic constraints, while neologisms exhibit high variation due to their origin in written digital contexts and their rapid spread across speech communities. The findings highlight the dynamic nature of modern English phonology and its continuous evolution under global and technological influences.*

Keywords. *English phonology; neologisms; borrowed words; loanword adaptation; pronunciation variation; phonological assimilation; stress patterns; digital communication; spoken English; lexical innovation.*

1. Theoretical Background

Borrowed words are lexical units taken from other languages, while neologisms are newly created words, either through internal word-formation (blending, compounding, conversion, clipping, acronymy) or via borrowing. Scholars such as Algeo, Crystal, Cannon, Haugen, and Weinreich note that English exhibits high lexical permeability due to cultural openness and social mobility.

Neologisms, especially in digital communication, are described as "phonologically fluid" (Crystal, 2011), since many originate in written form—hashtags, internet slang, brand names—and enter spoken language with considerable variation.

1.2 Phonological Integration

Several scholars (Haugen, 1950; Hockett, 1965; Trask, 1996) explain that loanwords undergo three stages of adaptation:

1. **Importation** – the word is introduced with foreign phonology intact (e.g., *croissant*, *karaoke*).

2. **Substitution** – sound segments shift toward English phonemes (e.g., /krwɑːˈs�õ/ → /krwʌˈsɑːnt/).

3. **Nativization** – the word becomes fully assimilated with stable English pronunciation.

In oral speech, speakers perform real-time phonological accommodation depending on their linguistic competence, awareness, and sociolinguistic attitude toward foreignness.

For neologisms, scholars highlight the influence of **orthography-driven pronunciation** (e.g., meme /miːm/, based on familiarity with the spelling), **phonological reduction in rapid speech**, and **emergence of new stress patterns** especially in compounds and blends (e.g., *FaceTime*, *YouTuber*, *hashtag*).

Research consistently shows that English prefers phonological regularity, often remodeling borrowed and newly created forms to fit dominant patterns such as:

- trochaic stress
- avoidance of complex consonant clusters
- substitution of unfamiliar vowels
- reduction in unstressed syllables

3. Phonological Features of Borrowed Words in English Oral Speech

3.1 Segmental Adaptation

Borrowed words often undergo changes to fit English phoneme inventory:

1. **Vowel substitution**
   - French *café* /kafe/ → English /ˈkæfeɪ/
   - Japanese *karaoke* /kaɾaoke/ → English /ˌkæriˈoʊki/

2. **Consonant substitution**
   - German *Bach* /bax/ → English /bɑːk/
   - Arabic *qalam* /q/ → English /k/ in *Qatar*, *Quran*

3. **Cluster simplification**

English disfavors initial clusters like /pt/, /kn/ → *pseudonym*, *knight* historically simplified.

Modern borrowings: Greek *pterodactyl* → English /ˌterəˈdæktɪl/.

3.2 Stress Patterns

Loanwords often change stress to conform to English prosody:

- French words gain initial stress:

déjà vu → /ˌdeɪʒɑː ˈvuː/

ballet → /ˈbæleɪ/

- Japanese borrowings often become trochaic:

sushi, *sumo*, *karaoke*

- Italian musical terms retain final stress among specialists but shift in general speech:

concerto (Italian /konˈtʃɛrto/) → English /kənˈtʃɜːrtoʊ/.

3.3 Rhythm and Reduction

English is stress-timed; therefore borrowed forms quickly adopt vowel reduction:

- *chocolate* /ˈtʃɒkələt/
- *restaurant* → /ˈrest(ə)rɒnt/

Even recent borrowings reduce unstressed vowels in rapid speech: *emoji* → /ɪˈmoʊdʒi/ ~ /əˈmoʊdʒi/

4. Phonological Characteristics of Neologisms in English Oral Speech

4.1 Orthography-Driven Pronunciation

Many new words emerge in written form:

- *GIF* → /ɡɪf/ or /dʒɪf/ (variation due to spelling)
- *meme* → /miːm/ (influenced by rhyme with *cream*)
- *hashtag* → /ˈhæʃtæɡ/

Users often rely on spelling because they learn neologisms visually, especially from social media.

4.2 Variability and Competing Pronunciations

Neologisms lack standardized phonology. Variation depends on:

- community norms
- frequency
- analogy to existing words

Examples:

- *data* → /ˈdeɪtə/ or /ˈdɑːtə/
- *Uber* → /ˈuːbər/ (from German /ˈyːbɐ/ but anglicized)
- *anime* → /ˈænɪmeɪ/ instead of Japanese /anime/

4.3 Stress in Compounds and Blends

English typically stresses the first element in compounds:

- *Facebook* → /ˈfeɪsbʊk/
- *YouTube* → /ˈjuːtuːb/
- *smartphone* → /ˈsmɑːrtfoʊn/

Blends (portmanteaus) show innovative stress placement:

- *hangry* → /ˈhæŋgri/
- *Brexit* → /ˈbreksɪt/
- *blogosphere* often shifts between /ˈblɒɡəsfɪr/ and /blɒˈɡɒsfiːr/.

4.4 Phonological Reduction in Fast Speech

New words undergo rapid phonological weakening when used frequently:

- *kind of* → *kinda* /ˈkaɪndə/
- *going to* → *gonna* /ˈɡʌnə/
- *want to* → *wanna* /ˈwɒnə/

These forms originate as neologistic contractions and become part of mainstream spoken English.

4.5 Influence of American English

Global media accelerates Americanized pronunciation standards:

- *internet* → /ˈɪnərnet/ (t-flapping in GA)
- *router* → /ˈruːtər/ (GA) vs /ˈraʊtə/ (BrE)
- *TikTok*, *podcast*, *viral* pronounced with American stress patterns worldwide.

5. Comparative Analysis: Borrowed Words vs Neologisms in Spoken English

Feature	Borrowed Words	Neologisms
Origin	Other languages	Internal (digigapital, social, technological) + borrowing
Phonological stability	Often stable after assimilation	Highly variable, changing
Stress adaptation	Moves to initial syllables	Follows English compound stress or inconsistent
Pronunciation influence	Donor language initially	Orthography and online usage
Integration speed	Slower, historically gradual	Very fast due to mass media
Variation	Reduces over time	Increases early on

Borrowed words begin as foreign elements, gradually adjusting to English phonotactics, while neologisms often arise already within English but lack standardized pronunciation, leading to a wider range of phonological variation.

Conclusion

Borrowed words and neologisms significantly enrich English vocabulary, but their integration into oral speech follows distinct phonological patterns. Borrowed words enter the language with foreign forms, undergoing gradual substitution of segments, stress restructuring, and rhythmic adaptation to conform to the English sound system. Neologisms, especially those generated by digital culture, are shaped by orthography, analogy, and community usage, resulting in high variability in pronunciation.

In both cases, **English phonotactic constraints**, such as preference for trochaic stress, avoidance of complex clusters, and vowel reduction, drive the adaptation process. The influence of American English through global media further accelerates the stabilization of certain pronunciations. Understanding these processes provides insight into how English continues to evolve as a dynamic, globally interconnected language.

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