A Contrastive Analysis of Mute Graphemes in English and Korean*

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I. Introduction

Saussure (1959: 23-24) states that “language and writing are two distinct system of signs; the second exists for the sole purpose of representing the first. The linguistic object is not both the written and the spoken forms of words; the spoken forms alone constitute the object”. Bloomfield (1933) and Sapir (1939) also shared the same view with Saussure that the written form of a language is a supplement to the spoken form of it. Moreover, the Generative theory of linguistics, which is the contemporary leading model for linguistic research, views the grammar of a language as the system of rules that specify the sound-meaning correspondence (Chomsky 1968). In other words, the spelling system or orthography has totally been excluded from the targets of linguistic research.

Following the tradition of the Generative linguistics, linguistic research has focused on rules which can define phonetic variations

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* This paper was presented at The 1st World Congress of Scholars of English Linguistics in June 25-30, 2012 which was held in Hanyang University. We’re very grateful to three anonymous reviewers for their suggestions and comments. Needless to say, all remaining errors and inadequacies are ours.
rather than graphic variations. Consequently, little attention has been paid to the study of writing or graphemics.

The term, graphemics, was coined on analogy with "phonemics" (Coulmas 1996). Depending on researches, the definition of graphemics varies. In this research, we follow Crystal (1987) definition: graphemics is a writing system including non-spelling system expressed by visual means as well as spelling system. Here, the non-spelling system refers to all the keys on the keyboard of a typewriter or computer (Mountford 1990; Kim 2005). There are two different views on graphemics: heterogeneous and independent ones. The one is dependent on phonemics. Under this view, grapheme is considered as the smallest segment of speech. In other words, a grapheme corresponds to a phoneme. In this view, an one-to-one correspondence between the grapheme and the phoneme is expected but that is not the case in real languages such as English and Korean as can be easily observed in mute graphemes, which have a physical form with no sound represented by it. In contrast, as the name implies, the other does not rely on phonemics (Hong 1981). According to this view, a grapheme is defined without reference to speech, a unity not corresponding to a phoneme.

The purpose of this study is to contrastively analyse mute graphemes in English and Korean. This paper has largely two parts. The first part concerns the distinction between the speech syllable and the graphic syllable. In this part, the definition of mute graphemes will

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1) Crystal (1987) defined that "The graphemes are the smallest unit in a writing system capable of causing a contrast in meaning".

2) The grapheme is mainly classified into two kinds: primary and secondary grapheme. The primary grapheme is the spelling grapheme which forms the word. This grapheme is divided into logographic and phonetic. The logographic grapheme represents the meaning. The phonetic grapheme represents the sound. The phonetic grapheme is subdivided into syllabic and phonemic. The secondary grapheme largely includes figural and spatial grapheme whether the grapheme is a figure or not. The letters of Korean and English are included in phonemic grapheme (Kim 2005).

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