

Korean Neologism Compounding: The Structural Composition and Semantic Functions Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Lexical borrowing has significantly altered the Korean compounding process over time. This study aims to analyze the formation of Korean neologism compound, focusing on structural composition and semantic functions they serve in the language. 313 instances of compounding were retrieved from the 2018 Neologism Survey (2018년 신어 조사) and 2019 Neologism Survey (2019년 신어 조사) reports. The results indicate that Korean compounds can be a mix of English, Sino-Korean, and native Korean elements. Loanwords exhibit phonological alternation, and components of the compound may take the form of truncated words, acronyms, blends, or with foreign affixes. Korean compounds display three functional types: subordinative, coordinative, attributive. Study suggests that word formation in Korean has become increasingly diverse compared to the past. Multiple morphological processes may operate simultaneously in the creation of new words, although loanwords are still subject to the phonotactic constraints. It is hoped that this study will contribute additional value to the existing research, also serve as foundation for future studies.

Keywords: neologism compound, loanword, phonological alternation, compound structure, semantic function

1. Korean Word Formation

The classification of languages by morphological types remains part of standard terminology today, despite being highly criticized by many topologists (Lehmann, 2013). Morphological typology is a branch of morphology that classifies languages based on how they form words by combining morphemes. Generally, there are three main types of morphological typology: fusional, isolating, and agglutinative. Korean is a typical agglutinative language in which grammatical relations are expressed by

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attaching various suffixes to stems (Sohn, 1999). Agglutinating type of languages, according to Iacobini (2006), can be indicated by how a word is formed by a root and (one or more) inflectional affixes, which are employed as a primary means to indicate the grammatical function of the word in the language. As an agglutinative language, Korean commonly uses affixation, along with borrowing and compounding, as morphological processes (Lee, 2003; Song, 2005).

Regarding affixation, Yu-Cho and Sells (1995) have provided an in-depth analysis of the phonology, morphology, and morphosyntax of inflectional suffixes in Korean from a consistently lexicalist perspective. Korean inflectional affixes are divided into three classes: nominal, verbal, and cross-categorical. Nominal affixes refer to those affixes that attach exclusively to nominal roots while verbal suffixes can be divided into two types, both of which attach exclusively to verbal roots or stems. One of them appears in contexts of verbal subordination (complementation and adjunction) or coordination, and is labelled as *Comp suffixes*. The other type may appear within *Comp suffixes* in subordinate or adjoined contexts, or when the verb serves as the head of a root clause; these are known as *non-Comp verbal suffixes*. On the other hand, cross-categorical suffixes are intuitively nominal affixes that can also attach to verbal roots or stems bearing *Comp* affixes.

Table 1. Inflectional affixes in Korean (Yoon, 1995)

	Affixed word	Transcription	Types
(i)	사람에게	salam _{NR} ROOT- ey key person- _{DATIVE} 'to a person'	Nominal suffix
(ii)	잡으시게	cap- usi -key catch- _{HON-COMP2} 'so that he (honorific) can catch'	Verbal suffix
(iii)	잡으시게도	cap-usi-key-to catch- _{HON-COMP2} -also 'so that he (honorific) can also catch'	Cross-categorical suffix

Some morphemes in Korean can act like affixes yet are regarded by many as non-affixes. For example, Lee (2017) emphasized the distinction between affixation and the meaning extension of a morpheme. The study focuses on several morphemes that have been considered adverbs, such as *hayk-* (핵) in *hayk-kongkam* (핵공감, “extreme empathy”) and *kay-* (개) in *kay-ccacung* (개짜증, “extreme annoyance”). The

results show that these two function as affixes that add an emphatic meaning when placed before nouns and predicates. Choi (2025), on the other hand, examined morphemes that are traditionally regarded as shortened forms of long-form negation, such as *canhta-* (잡) in *cem-canhta* (점잡다, “respect”) and *chanh-* (참) in *simsim-chanhta* (심심참다, “bored”). These morphemes function as negative affixes in word formation. Unlike long-form negation in sentences, these affixes cannot create sentential negation. Borrowed affixes also exist in this language, showing relatively small morphological productivity compared to other well-researched coinages. Nonetheless, the growing popularity of Konglish might be perceived as the beginning of further and even more prominent changes to the Korean language, leading to the wider use of foreign affixes such as *-le* (러), *-icum* (이즘), *-isuthu* (이스트), and *anthi-* (안티) (Borowiak, 2022). Affixation in this language seems to be one of the productive ways to create new words.

Affixes are not the only elements this language has borrowed; full function words have been borrowed as well. As Thomason and Kaufman (1988) state, words are the first foreign elements to enter the borrowing language, and thus loanwords are the most commonly attested language contact phenomenon. Oh and Son (2024) observed that Korean speakers’ attitudes toward loanword usage changed markedly in 1990s. During this period, speakers increasingly preferred core loanwords over native Korean equivalents, as well as verbal loan blends formed with the suffixes *-hata* (하다 ‘do’) or *-twayda* (되다 ‘become’), as in *maychinghata* (매칭하다 ‘match’) and *sethinghata* (세팅하다 ‘set’). However, loanwords in Korean do not always retain their original meanings.

According to Tyson (1993), the semantic values of English-derived words in Korean are frequently narrowed, broadened, or shifted to denote related objects or concepts. Lee (2024) further reported that approximately 38% of the loanwords used in educational contexts are not true cognates of their English counterparts. In addition to semantic change, certain loanwords also undergo phonological adaptation. Because Korean and the source language possess distinct phonemic inventories, such phonological alteration is an inevitable outcome of the borrowing process. For example, the liquid representations of loanwords in Korean exhibit consistent patterns depending on their syllable position. However, there are a few exceptions. Intervocalic /l/ can have two realizations, as in *meyllon/meylon* (멜론/메론 ‘melon’), and in some cases, the coda /r/ is not deleted, as in *olukan* (오르간 ‘organ’), which violates the general rule of coda /r/-deletion (Oh, 2014). The following examples illustrate loanwords in Korean:

Table 2. Loanwords in Korean (Tyson, 1993; Oh, 2014)

	Loanword word	Transcription	Description
(i)	미팅	/mithing/ 'blind date'	semantic narrowing
(ii)	서비스	/sepisu/ 'anything offered free of charge'	extended meaning
(iii)	라디오	/latio/ 'radio'	phonological alteration

Another productive process by which this language creates new words is compounding. In linguistic terms, compounding refers to the process by which a language forms new words by combining two or more independent words, creating a single unit with a new meaning (Lieber, 2010). Over the years, the Korean language has assimilated foreign words into its grammatical system, and these words have become commonly used by its speakers. As previously noted, lexical borrowing is a common phenomenon in Korean, driven by various social and cultural factors. When a new concept, technology, or cultural practice is introduced, foreign terms are often adopted to represent these innovations. Over time, however, these borrowed words frequently undergo phonological adaptation to conform to the phonotactic rules of Korean. For instance, the English word 'computer' is pronounced *khemphyuthe* (컴퓨터) in Korean, reflecting the constraints of the language's phoneme inventory. Such adaptations illustrate the interplay between globalization and language, as Korean integrates foreign vocabulary while maintaining its own phonological and grammatical identity.

Sometimes, loanwords can also form part of compound words, either by combining with native words or with other loanwords. This study aims to analyze the formation processes of compound words in Korean, focusing not only on their structural composition but also on the semantic functions carried by each compound. Before delving deeper into the topic, the following section will provide a brief discussion of previous studies on Korean compounding. By examining the previous studies as well as the new data, this study seeks to highlight the ways in which foreign and native elements interact in the Korean lexicon.

2. Compounding in Korean

Compounding process in Korean has been extensively discussed in the literature, with notable contributions from scholars such as Jeong (1992), Han (1993), Park et al. (2004), Jeong (2010), Bae and Yi (2016), Lee (2018), and Cho (2019). Jeong (2010) argues that Korean compounds exhibit a binary structural configuration in which the head consistently occupies the right-hand position. Consequently, the compound inherits the majority of its syntactic and semantic properties from this head element.

There are multiple frameworks through which compounding can be classified. Lee (2020) classified Korean noun compounds into three types according to their morphological structure. The first type involves two nouns combining directly without any intervening element, as in *chayk kapang* (책가방 ‘school bag’). The second type includes compounds in which the *sai-siot* (the interfix *ㅅ*) appears between the two nouns, as in *namu-s-nip* (나무잎 ‘tree leaf’). The third type involves truncation occurring between the two nouns, as in *nam-pukkuk* (남북극 ‘north and south pole’), which is derived from *namkuk* (남극 ‘south pole’) and *pukkuk* (북극 ‘north pole’). Jeong (1992), in contrast, classified Korean compounds according to the types of interactions that occur between the elements within the compound. He proposed two major categories of compounding: sub-compounds and co-compounds. A sub-compound is a compound in which the two elements have an asymmetrical relationship; one element is the head, while the other element modifies or specifies it. A co-compound is a compound in which the two elements have a symmetrical relationship; neither element is the head and both elements contribute equally to the meaning. Examples of these types of compounds in Korean are provided below:

Table 3. Sub-compounds and co-compounds in Korean (Jeong, 1992)

	Compound word	Transcription	Compound type
(i)	미역 국	/miyek + kuk/ 'seaweed (n) + soup (n)'	sub-compound
(ii)	구운 밤	/kuun + pam/ 'roasted (v) + chestnut (v)'	sub-compound
(iii)	밤낮	/pam + nat/ 'night (n) + day (n)'	co-compound
(iv)	손발	/son + pal/ 'hand (n) + foot (n)'	co-compound

Korean compounds may also be classified based on the types of constituents that compose them. Han (1993) argues that there are three types of compound words found in Korean namely prosodic word (ω) compounds, prosodic root (R) compounds and “asymmetric” compounds. The ω -compounds are a class of compounds that consist of free stems as in Table 4(i), while R-compounds are a combination of Sino-Korean roots, all of which are monosyllabic (Song, 1986) as in (ii). In contrast to these two, “asymmetric” compounds are composed of a prosodic word and a prosodic root as shown in (iii) below:

Table 4. Compounds in Korean (Han, 1993)

	Compound word	Transcription	Compound type
(i)	목소리	/mok+soli/ 'throat+sound' 'voice'	prosodic word compound
(ii)	대학	/tay+hak/ 'big+learning' 'university'	prosodic root compound
(iii)	시민권	/simin+kwan/ 'citizen+right' 'citizenship'	“asymmetric” compound

Compounding has played a longstanding role in Korean morphology. Indeed, certain lexical items began as syntactic compounds but have, over time, become lexicalized as single morphemes. Words such as *ehun* (어른 ‘adult’) and *sselmul* (썰물 ‘movement of the tide out to sea’) can no longer be analyzed as a compound. Cho

(2019) proposed that such words be analyzed through unitarization. The scholar classified compounds into two types: complete unitarization, which cannot be analyzed, and incomplete unitarization, which is partially analyzable synchronically but poses certain analytical challenges, as illustrated by *mul* (물 ‘water’) in *sselmul*.

Korean compounding has been examined not only through traditional analyses, but certain scholars have also employed computational approaches toward the analysis. Bae and Yi (2016), for example, investigated morphological processing in the visual recognition of Korean compound words containing *sai-siot* (a single consonant inserted between morphemes during phonological changes) using the constituent priming method. Park et al. (2004), on the other hand, introduced GECORAM (Generalized Combination of a Rule-based learning And Memory-based learning), a system designed to handle compound nouns. In applications such as machine translation and information retrieval, compound nouns must often be decomposed into individual nouns for further analysis. GECORAM addresses this challenge by combining rule-based and memory-based learning techniques, enabling more accurate processing and understanding of complex noun structures in natural language.

It can be concluded that the compounding process in Korean has been an interesting topic discussed by many scholars. Compounding, like many other word-formation processes, may also change over time. With the increasing adaptation of loanwords into Korean, there is an impact on compound word formation. This study provides a descriptive analysis of neologism compounding, focusing on how loanwords may affect both the structure and function of compounding.

3. Methodology

The data for this study was retrieved from the 2018 Neologism Survey (2018년 신어 조사) and 2019 Neologism Survey (2019년 신어 조사) reports, obtained from the official website of the National Institute of the Korean Language. These reports were compiled to identify the neologisms, a newly coined word, expression, or term in a language. It lists new words adapted into Korean through various morphological processes, including loanwords, affixation, blending, acronyms, truncation, and compounding. The term neologism can be interpreted in various ways. According to Harutyunyan (2024), neologism refers to a recently created word, term, or phrase,

often developed to describe new concepts or to modernize older terms. Ismoilova et al. (2023) describe neologisms as words or phrases that are novel in form and meaning at the time of writing and carry new socio-cultural connotations. Thus, both newly coined words and units currently present in the nominative fund, in terms of form and meaning, are considered neologisms. While the daily emergence of neologisms in any language may be incalculable, not all achieve widespread usage or inclusion in dictionaries. Nevertheless, lexicographers aim to record all new lexical units, providing a comprehensive view of ongoing trends in the evolution of language and the culture that uses it.

Since there is no fixed time frame for defining neologisms, this study considers them based on their new socio-cultural connotations. Accordingly, although the data come from 2018 and 2019, they are still deemed relevant, as they reflect changes in word patterns compared to earlier data. This study focuses on words formed through compounding, though instances where compounding occurs alongside other processes are also included. Only compounds consisting of two elements were included in this study. A total of 313 instances were found, and the data can be further categorized as follows:

Table 5. Classification and frequency of Korean compounds

	English	Sino	Native
English	71	47	10
Sino	39	73	15
Native	9	31	18
	119	151	43
Total			313

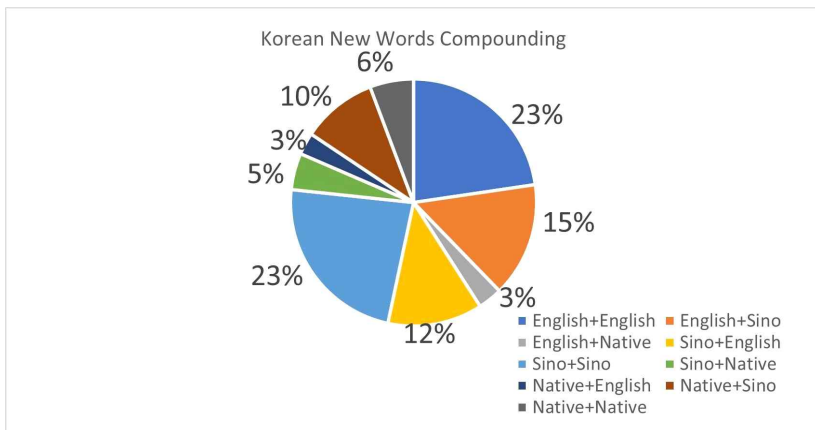


Figure 1. Percentage of Korean compounds.

Figure 1 presents nine patterns of Korean compounds: English+English, English+Sino-Korean, English+Native, Sino-Korean+English, Sino-Korean+Sino-Korean, Sino-Korean+Native, Native+English, Native+Sino-Korean, and Native+Native. Combinations of Sino-Korean words constitute one of the most prevalent patterns in the dataset, accounting for 23% of the total. Furthermore, the data suggest that loanwords have introduced notable changes to the landscape of Korean compounding. Previous studies have paid limited attention to the role of loanwords, focusing primarily on categorizing compounds into structural types. However, the present data indicate that loanwords, particularly those from English, play a central role in Korean compounding. Combinations involving English account for more than half of all compounds in the dataset (23% English+English, 15% English+Sino-Korean, 12% Sino-Korean+English, 3% English+Native, and 3% Native+English; see Figure 1). These findings suggest that English loanwords are not merely peripheral additions but have become structurally integrated into contemporary compound formation.

One of the primary objectives of this study is to examine the structural patterns of Korean neologism compounds. Accordingly, the data were classified based on the structural configuration of each compound. While some compounds exhibit recurring structural patterns, others display structural irregularities. These irregular patterns are discussed in the first part of the Results section. The second objective of this study is to investigate the semantic functions of the compounds. For this purpose, the data were categorized following the framework proposed by Fábregas and Scalise (2025), which classifies compounds according to the headness principle

and the semantic relationship established between their constituent elements. The discussion is further elaborated in the second part of the Results section.

4. Results and Discussion

The discussion is divided into two main parts. The first part focuses on examining the structural aspects of Korean compounds, including the different patterns of element combinations and how they are organized within the compound. The second part addresses the semantic functions of these compounds, analyzing how meaning is conveyed through their structural composition and how each type of compound serves different communicative or lexical purposes in the language.

4.1. Compound structure

Korean compound neologisms exhibit structural distinctions that set them apart from traditional compounds. As noted earlier, many loanwords, particularly those from English are used in the formation of Korean compound words. However, rather than being adopted in their full original forms, these loanwords typically undergo phonological alternation to conform to the phonotactic constraints of Korean. Phonotactic constraints may operate at the levels of inventory, position, and sequence, as illustrated in Table 6 below:

Table 6. Compound words undergo phonological changes due to phonotactic constraints

	Input	Output	Meaning
(i)	vaping room /veɪpɪŋ rum/	베이핑 룸 /peɪphɪŋ rum/	Creation of a smoke-free environment by installing e-cigarettes including offices, apartment complexes, and other places specifically designed for e-cigarette use
(ii)	switch분자 /swɪtʃ buntʃa/	스위치 분자 /suwɪtʃi punʃa/	Molecule that blocks the operation of the gene scissors that cut the target gene.
(iii)	bulk money /bʌlk 'mʌni/	벌크 머니 /pelkhu meni/	A term referring to a large amount of cash

Korean has a limited fricative inventory, consisting of only three attested phonemes: /s/, /ss/, and /h/. When a word contains a fricative segment not present

in Korean, that segment is replaced with one sharing the same place of articulation, as shown in Table 6(i). Because /v/ is absent from the Korean phonemic inventory, the initial segment of /veɪpɪŋ/ is realized as [p], yielding [peɪpɪŋ]. In term of position, affricates are not permitted in word-final position. When an affricate appears in this position, it is neutralized to the voiceless alveolar stop /t/, as illustrated by 빛 (*pit* not *pitch*, 'light') and 빚 (*pit* not *pic*, 'debt'). However, the pattern differs in loanwords. Rather than being replaced, the affricate undergoes resyllabification, whereby /i/ is inserted and the affricate is reassigned as the onset of a newly created syllable, as shown in (ii). The voiceless palate-alveolar affricate /tʃ/ in /swɪtʃ/ first changed to voiceless alveolo-palatal /ch/ then undergoes resyllabification to form [suwitʃi].

Phonological alternation also occurs due to segmental sequencing. Korean does not permit true segment clusters in either the onset or the coda position. Orthographically, however, Hangeul allows certain coda clusters to be written, such as /ks/ (ㄱㅍ), /nc/ (ㄴㅈ), /nh/ (ㄴㅎ), /lp/ (ㄹㅍ), /ls/ (ㄹㅅ), /lth/ (ㄹㅈ), and /lph/ (ㄹㅍㅎ). Phonologically though, only one consonant is realized, typically the final consonant of the cluster. In the loanword data, a different strategy was employed to resolve segment clustering: resyllabification occurs, separating the two segments into distinct syllables, as shown in (iii).

Korean neologism compounding also displays variation in terms of what kinds of elements can be combined to form it. Unlike contemporary compounds, the neologism compounding exhibits a broader range of morphological processes, often occurring simultaneously with compounding. One such process is truncation, in which a word is shortened; substantial research has examined how to predict the truncated form of a given word (Katamba, 2005). Truncation constitutes a productive morphological process in traditional Sino-Korean word formation. A representative example is found in traditional Korean naming pattern, where vocative truncation applies, resulting in the deletion of the generation marker, as illustrated below:

Table 7. Vocative truncation in Korean traditional naming (Kahawara & Lee, 2018)

	Original form	Vocative form
(i)	[hoŋ.hi]	[hoŋ.a]
(ii)	[tʃe in]	[in+a]
(iii)	[tʃa hi]	[tʃa.ja]
(iv)	[tʃe u]	[u.ja]

As shown in the table above, truncation applies to either the first or the second syllable. The vocative form is derived through suffixation of the vowel /-a/ to the truncated base. When hiatus arises as a result of vowel adjacency, glide insertion occurs, yielding the epenthetic segment [j] to resolve the vowel sequence. As with word truncation, truncation in compounding may occur randomly, targeting either the first or the second constituent of the compound. It can also take place within English, Sino-Korean, and native Korean words. However, the data indicate that truncation occurs predominantly in English words. As English lexical items tend to be longer in syllable count than Korean lexical items, truncation processes apply during adaptation, producing monosyllabic or bisyllabic forms, as exemplified below:

Table 8. Truncated English words

	English word	Truncated form	Meaning
(i)	서브티트드 /seputitutu/	서브 /sep/	substitute
(ii)	아이템 /ayteym/	템 /teym/	item
(iii)	컨슈머 /kensyume/	슈머 /syume/	consumer
(iv)	페이케이션 /peykeysyen/	케이션 /keysyen/	vacation
(v)	테크노로기 /tekunoloki/	테크 /teku/	technology

The examples shown in Table 8 above indicate that, despite the presence of some larger words in Korean compounds, bisyllabic words are preferred, resulting in a

truncation process, especially in loanwords. Examples of compound with truncated element are provided in Table 9 below:

Table 9. Truncated words as part of compound

	Compound word	Transcription	Meaning
(i)	자취 텀 (자취+아이템)	/catchi teym/ (catchi + ayteym) 'live alone+item'	A term for something suitable for living alone
(ii)	필 환경 (필요한)	/pil hwankyeng/ (pilyohan+ hwankyeng) 'necessary+environment'	A good environment that must be created for survival
(iii)	카멜레 존 (카멜레온+존)	/khamelle con/ (khamelleon+ con) 'chameleon+zone'	Refers to a space that can be used for various purposes offline

Acronyms can also appear as elements within compounds. Strictly speaking, the term 'acronym' refers to pronounceable abbreviations formed from the initial letters of a compound term, whereas 'initialism' refers to the same type of abbreviation that is unpronounceable. Despite this original distinction, Izura and Playfoot (2011) argue that the term 'initialism' is rarely used, and 'acronym' has broadened in meaning to include both pronounceable and unpronounceable abbreviations. This study acknowledges the concept proposed by these scholars. The data indicate that acronyms occur only in English loanwords prior to the compounding process. Although such acronyms may resemble existing dictionary words, as shown in Table 10(i) and (ii), their meanings do not correspond to the actual referents. In addition, acronyms may take the form of unpronounceable abbreviations, as illustrated in (iii) below:

Table 10. Acronym words as part of compound

Compound word	Transcription	Meaning
(i) 파이어 족	/phaie cok/ 'FIRE+tribe'	Person who aims to retire early, in their late 30s or early 40s, by saving all the money they need after retirement FIRE: financial independence, retire early
(ii) 파이 세대	/phai setay/ 'PIE+generation'	Young generation that values individuality, self-development and experiences they can have now, and consumes with these values. PIE: personality, invest myself, experience
(iii) 엠제트 세대	/emcetu setay/ 'MZ+generation'	Term that refers to both millennial generation and Z generation MZ: millennial, Z

A blend word may also serve as an element within a compound. According to Kang (2013), blending has been argued to be considered as a regular word formation process in Korean along with affixation and compounding. Blending shares a property with compounding in that both processes require the combination of at least two elements. However, a blend word typically undergoes truncation before the elements are joined to form a single word, as illustrated in Table 11 below. Blending may occur within words of the same language, as illustrated in Table 11(i) and (ii), which involve Sino-Korean and English. Respectively, it may occur in mixed words, as shown in (iii), which represents a combination of Sino-Korean and English:

Table 11. Blend words as part of compound

Compound word	Transcription	Meaning
(i) 학폭 투 (학교+폭력)	/hakphok thu/ (hakkyo+phoklyek) 'school bully+too'	A movement to raise awareness of the seriousness of school violence by sharing experiences of being a victim of school violence. Or to promote such activities
(ii) 셸피의 법칙 (셸프+해피)	/selphiuy pepchik/ (selphi+hayphi) 'self happy+rule'	Refers to a lifestyle that pursues one's own happiness rather than following societal conventions
(iii) 실버 돌싱 (돌아오다+싱글)	/silpe tolsing/ (tolaota+singgul) 'silver+return single'	A term referring to an elderly person who has become alone again due to bereavement or divorce

Foreign affixes are common in Korean, as noted by Borowiak (2022). In

neologism compounding, foreign affixes can also appear as elements within the compound. Typically, these foreign affixes attach to roots within the same language (English, for example), as shown in Table 12(i). However, there are cases in which foreign affixes are attached to roots from a different language, as illustrated in (ii) and (iii). Affixes can appear in either the first or the second word and undergo phonological alternation in the same way as the root.

Table 12. Compound word with foreign affix

Compound word	Transcription	Meaning
(i) 언택트 소비 (언+컨택트)	/enthaykthu sopi/ (en +kentaykthu) 'un+contact+consumption'	Consumption that takes place without direct, in-person contact between the seller and the customer
(ii) 임밍아웃 (임신+잉)	/im ing aut/ (imsin+ ing) 'pregnant+ ing +out'	Publicly revealing pregnancy. The normative notation is uncertain
(iii) 장거리 통학러 (통학+러)	/cangkeli thonghacle/ (thonghak+ le) 'long distance + commute to school + er '	A person who attends a school far from home

Another characteristic of this type of compound is that the foreign affix consistently surfaces in a separate syllable. This pattern suggests that the affix is phonologically integrated into the host language in a way that preserves syllable structure constraints rather than attaching directly to the root without modification. To maintain syllabic separation between the root and the affix, consonant epenthesis applies, thereby supplying an onset to the affixal syllable. In other words, an additional consonantal segment is inserted to satisfy the requirement that syllables begin with an onset. For instance, in 12(ii), an epenthetic /m/ occupies the onset position of the prefix /-ing/, yielding [-ming], whereas an epenthetic /l/ occupies the onset of /-er/, yielding [-ler]. The insertion of these consonants prevents vowel-initial affixes from forming onsetless syllables and ensures conformity with the phonotactic constraints of the recipient language. This pattern demonstrates that phonological adaptation is not confined to the internal structure of loanwords (as illustrated in Table 6), but also extends to loan affixes (as shown in Table 12). Therefore, both lexical items and bound morphemes undergo systematic phonological restructuring during the borrowing process.

This section discussed the structure of Korean neologism compounds. Although English words are widely used, they still must abide by the phonotactic restrictions imposed by the Korean language. Consequently, phonological alterations arise in response to these constraints, affecting both the internal structure of loanwords and loan affixes. Neologism compounds also display variation in terms of the types of elements that can be combined to form them. Truncated words, acronyms, blended words, as well as words with foreign affixes can all serve as elements within a compound. In the next section, we will discuss the semantic functions of compounds that exist in Korean.

4.2. Semantic function of compound

Previous studies of Korean compounding have proposed various ways of categorizing compounds, one of which involves the notion of headedness. However, the categorization is consistently binary, whereby a compound that is not subordinative is treated as coordinative (see Jeong (1992)). This categorization may be traced back to the earliest classification of compounds proposed by Bloomfield (1933), as shown below:

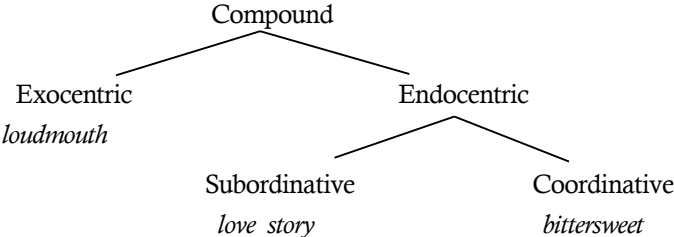


Figure 2. Bloomfield’s compounds classification (Scalise & Bisetto, 2005).

As illustrated in the figure above, compounds can be broadly classified into two types: exocentric and endocentric. Both exocentric and its counterpart, endocentric describe the two possible relationships between the constituents of a compound and the compound lexeme they form. In endocentric compounds, one of the constituent lexemes functions as the head, meaning that the semantic and syntactic features of this lexical item are inherited by the entire compound. In contrast, in exocentric

compounds, the features of the whole compound cannot be directly attributed to its constituents and must instead be interpreted outside the compound structure. Within this framework, endocentric compounds are further divided into two types: subordinative and coordinative, reflecting a binary categorization. However, this binary classification was soon challenged by some scholars. In 2005, Scalise and Bisetto proposed a novel categorization of compounds based on the fact that the two constituents are linked by a grammatical relation that is not overtly expressed. Within this categorization, the notion of headedness continues to play a crucial role in determining the type of compound. However, rather than maintaining a binary categorization, these scholars introduced an additional type of compound, the attributive compound, thus challenging the traditional classification system. The proposed classification of compounds is shown in the following figure:

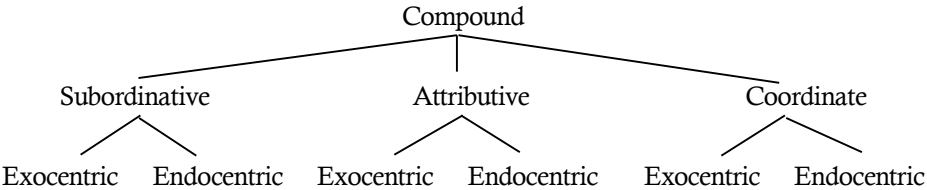


Figure 3. Scalise and bisetto’s compounds classification (Scalise & Bisetto, 2005).

Under this revised framework, compounds are initially categorized into three types: subordinative, attributive, and coordinative. Unlike the earlier framework, subordinative and coordinative compounds are not restricted to endocentric structures, as some may also display exocentric properties. According to Scalise, Fabregas and Forza (2009), the identification of a compound as endocentric or exocentric depends on the notion of head: if a compound has a head (or two), it is called endocentric; if it has no head, it is called exocentric. In this study, the notion of the head remains the primary criterion for categorizing Korean neologism compounds. In fact, the headness principle also plays a significant role in syntax, with Korean being considered a head-final language. Even in compounds, the head consistently occupies the right-hand position (Jeong, 2010), which aligns with the syntactic structure. Compounds be classified according to the relationship established between their two elements. Korean neologism compounds exhibit three types of such relationships: subordinative, coordinative, and attributive. In subordinative compounds, the head determines the overall meaning, while the non-head serves

as a modifier. The non-head typically receives a semantic role from the head, similar to the relationship between a predicate and its arguments or modifiers. As noted by Jeong (2010), the head of a Korean compound consistently appears in the right-hand position. The following are examples of subordinative compounds in Korean:

Table 13. Subordinative compounds in Korean

Compound word	Transcription	Meaning
(i) 비타민 베이퍼	/pithamin peiphe/ 'vitamin+vapor'	Term for liquid electronic cigarettes containing vitamins as their main ingredient
(ii) 베이핑 카페	/peiphing khaphe/ 'vaping+café'	Café with a space where you can smoke electronic cigarettes
(iii) 제트 주사	/cethu cusa/ 'jet+inject'	Injecting a fine spray of liquid under high pressure under the skin using a syringe without using a needle

The examples presented in Table 13 are predominantly endocentric, as each contains a constituent that functions as the head. This head subsequently determines the overall meaning of the newly formed compound, thereby exhibiting a subordinative property. Conversely, in a coordinative compound, the two constituents share equal responsibility for the word's meaning, with neither determining the semantic role of the other. The elements combined generally need to have the same grammatical category. Consider the examples in Table 14 below:

Table 14. Coordinative compounds in Korean

Compound word	Transcription	Meaning
(i) 런 예인	/len yein/ 'run + celebrity'	A term used to liken a runner who is famous or popular to a celebrity. It is a combination of "running" and "celebrity."
(ii) 로봇 시민권자	/lopot siminkwonca/ 'robot+citizen'	A term referring to a robot that possesses citizenship, a right normally held by ordinary people or residents
(iii) 리플레이 어택	/lipullei ethayk/ 'replay+attack'	Phenomenon in which virtual currency stored in a user's digital wallet is hacked and withdrawn into another digital wallet similar to the original wallet, resulting in duplicate withdrawals

In Table 14(i), *len yein* (런 예인 ‘run celebrity’) designates an individual who is a runner but is also recognized for celebrity-like popularity. In (ii), *lopot siminkwonca* (로봇 시민권자 ‘robot citizen’) denotes an entity that is a robot yet simultaneously holds citizenship, thereby qualifying as a citizen. Both of these examples are formed through the combination of two nouns. A coordinative compound may also be created through the combination of two verbs, as illustrated in (iii), where *liphullei* (리플레이 ‘replay’) and *ethayk* (어택 ‘attack’) merge to form a new lexical item referring to a phenomenon associated with virtual currency. Since the two elements of a coordinative compound belong to the same grammatical category and contribute equally to the overall meaning, identifying a single head in such structures is problematic. One possible account is that both constituents function as heads simultaneously, resulting in a dual-headed configuration. One property of coordinative compounds that might support this view is that sometimes in this class each constituent must carry its own inflection. In terms of exocentricity, the examples provided in Table 14 can be considered endocentric due to the presence of a head. Unlike subordinative compounds, which have a single head determining the meaning of the whole, these examples differ in that they contain more than one head. This multiplicity of heads distinguishes them structurally and semantically from typical subordinative compounds.

The distinction between coordinative and subordinative compounds is relatively traditional, but the typology has been increased by the addition of attributive compounds (Scalise & Bisetto, 2005). In these compounds, which would traditionally be classified as subordinative, the non-head does not get a semantic role from the head, but rather predicates some of its properties, acting like an attributive adjective inside a noun phrase (NP). Consider the examples in Table 15 below:

Table 15. Attributive compounds in Korean

	Compound word	Transcription	Meaning
(i)	더티 커피	/tothi khephi/ 'dirty+coffee'	Coffee topped generously with cream or milk until it overflows, with syrup or chocolate powder sprinkled on top
(ii)	호떡 보트	/hottek potu/ 'hotteok+boat'	A round, flat boat shaped like a hotteok. Usually used for play
(iii)	화이트 사업자	/hwaithu saepca/ 'white+businessman'	A business owner with no history of violating business-related laws or tax laws

In these cases, the words *tothi* (더티 ‘dirty’), *hottek* (호떡 ‘hotteok’), and *hwaitthu* (화이트 ‘white’) modify the heads *khophi* (커피 ‘coffee’), *pothu* (보트 ‘boat’), and *saepca* (사업자 ‘businessman’) in a way similar to how adjectives modify nouns. They add specific properties to the denotation of the head, resulting in a more specialized subtype of the object referred to by the head. *Tothi khephi* refers to a coffee with overflowing milk and chocolate powder, which makes it look “dirty,” while *hottek potu* denotes a boat that resembles *hottek*, a traditional Korean bread. On the other hand, *hwaitthu saepca* refers to a businessman with no negative history, as implied by the pureness color white.

5. Conclusion

As the data were obtained from a previous report, some forms may no longer be in current use, as language evolves over time. However, it indicates that over the years, Korean has become increasingly receptive to foreign lexical items, incorporating them into a wide range of contexts. Loanwords, particularly those from English, are now well established in the language. The data clearly show that loanwords play a significant role in Korean compounding processes. Nevertheless, such items must undergo phonological alternations shaped by Korean phonotactic constraints. In contrast to traditional compounds, neologism compounds display a wider range of structural patterns, including truncated forms, acronyms, blends, and elements incorporating foreign affixes.

Korean compounds have been classified in various ways in the literature. In this study, the headedness principle is adopted as a key concept for understanding compound semantics. A compound is endocentric if one element functions as the head, and exocentric if no head can be identified. Following Fábregas and Scalise (2025), Korean neologism compounds are further categorized into three types based on the semantic relationship between their constituents. In subordinative compounds, the head determines the overall meaning, while the non-head acts as a modifier. In coordinative compounds, both constituents contribute equally to the compound’s meaning. In attributive compounds, the non-head does not receive a semantic role from the head but instead predicates one of its properties, functioning similarly to an attributive adjective within a noun phrase.

This descriptive study provided basic information regarding Korean neologism compounds without implementing any theories or approaches in the analysis. The

data for this study also came from a small-sized dictionary, covering only two years, from 2018 to 2019. To ensure more accurate information regarding Korean compounding, a new study implementing suitable theories as well as a larger dataset is suggested for future research.

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Appendices

Native+English

No.	Native word	English word	Compound word	Frequency
1	어깨걸이	숏	어깨걸이 숏	3
2	아재	메뉴	아재 메뉴	3
3	물병	캠코더	물병 캠코더	11
4	도를 믿는	맨	도민 맨	3
5	김치	프리미엄	김치 프리미엄	7
6	솔로	이코노믹스	솔로 이코노믹스	3
7	나 나	랜드	나나 랜드	748
8	덕질	메이트	덕질 메이트	290
9	그럴	인싸이더	그럴 싸	54

Native+Sino

No.	Native word	English word	Compound word	Frequency
10	싫존	주의	싫존 주의	77
11	폼앗이	등재	폼앗이 등재	6
12	수발	대행업체	수발 대행업체	10
13	살코기	세대	살코기 세대	16
14	사랑	과세	사랑 과세	198
15	폰 테크놀로지	족	폰테크 족	3
16	별집	계좌	별집 계좌	644
17	물음표	살인마	물음표 살인마	21
18	메기	기업	메기 기업	3
19	뒷모습	증후군	뒷모습 증후군	22
20	덜덜이	작업	덜덜이 작업	77
21	맹맹	미	맹맹 미	3
22	단짠	연애	단짠 연애	5
23	턱	부심	턱 부심	5
24	꾸밈	노역	꾸밈 노역	5
25	찍어서 결제	세대	찍결 세대	6
26	줍줍	족	줍줍 족	85

No.	Native word	English word	Compound word	Frequency
27	나심비	족	나심비 족	1
28	어른이	보험	어른이 보험	35
30	줍줍	현상	줍줍 현상	29
31	덕후 심	일체	덕심 일체	22
32	떡튀	진료	떡튀 진료	22
33	맛 세	권	맛세 권	21
34	붕세	권	붕세 권	6
35	빛 투	운동	빛투 운동	26
36	손가락	여행족	손가락 여행족	6
37	수평	어	수평 어	37
38	아버이	주의	아버이 주의	4
39	강아지	집사	강아지 집사	8
40	골로	족	골로 족	12

Sino+English

No.	Native word	English word	Compound word	Frequency
41	언어	힐링 족	언어 힐링족	4
42	빈집	스타일	빈집 스타일	9
43	특가	아이템	특가 템	4
44	핵	인싸이더	핵 인싸	3,577
45	세포	마켓	세포 마켓	268
46	약	투	약 투	196
47	학교 폭력	투	학폭 투	27
48	반	프리	반 프리	26
49	과시	아이템	과시 템	3
50	은행	패싱	은행 패싱	3
51	김치	프리미엄	김치 프리미엄	1,515
52	신냉전	벨트	신냉전 벨트	5
53	식빵	카페	식빵 카페	4
54	시한부	아이돌	시한부 아이돌	5
55	세기말	키즈	세기말 키즈	8

No.	Native word	English word	Compound word	Frequency
56	생리대	포비아	생리대 포비아	18
57	사회	포비아	사회 포비아	4
58	목욕탕	포비아	목욕탕 포비아	5
59	대안	라이트	대안 라이트	4
60	기부	포비아	기부 포비아	182
61	탈출	러시	탈덕 러시	3
62	탄수화물	파티	탄수화물 파티	3
63	극렬	아이디	극렬 아이디	122
64	국가	픽	국가 픽	71
65	핵	아웃싸이더	핵 아싸	71
66	접견	피싱	접견 피싱	48
67	반	프리	반 프리	26
68	복면	웨어	복면 웨어	2
69	임신+밍	아웃	임밍아웃	5
70	자유 부인	타임	자부 타임	4
71	자취	아이템	자취 템	4
72	가성비	아이템	가성비템	8
73	가족	인터테이너	가족테이너	4
74	경찰	로또	경찰 로또	3
75	차박	텐트	차박 텐트	14
76	초	인싸이더	초 인싸	3
77	공병	아이템	공병템	5
78	공 센트럴	파크	공트럴 파크	15
79	국립 중앙	굿즈	국중 굿즈	4

English+English

No.	English word	English word	Compound word	Frequency
80	워드	백	워드 백	9
81	에그	포비아	에그 포비아	205
82	엘사	게이트	엘사 게이트	121
83	언 컨택트	서비스	언택트 서비스	13

No.	English word	English word	Compound word	Frequency
84	언 컨택트	마케팅	언택트 마케팅	110
85	하우스	디바이드	하우스 디바이드	15
86	하비	컨슈머	하비 슈머	47
87	앵그리	실버	앵그리 실버	6
88	아이스 애슬레저	룩	아이스레저 룩	7
89	피티	헌팅	피티 헌팅	3
90	아마존	포비아	아마존 포비아	7
91	씨 디톡스	푸드	씨톡스 푸드	20
92	실버	페이	실버 페이	5
93	스페이스	러시	스페이스 러시	4
94	스쿨	미 투	스쿨 미투	578
95	스모그	패션	스모그 패션	6
96	스마트	테스팅	스마트 테스트	6
97	스노	베이비	스노 베이비	15
98	솔라	셰어링	솔라 셰어링	21
99	소셜	블랙아웃	소셜 블랙아웃	30
100	세일	브레이크	세일 브레이크	4
101	셀피	커피	셀피 커피	14
102	서브티트드	푸드	서브 푸드	4
103	샤프	파워	샤프 파워	97
104	비트코인	블루	비트코인 블루	50
105	뷰티	터닝	뷰티 터닝	4
106	브랜드 픽닉	마케팅	브랜드 마케팅	12
107	베드	베이케이션	베드 케이션	23
108	핑키	볼	핑키 볼	3
109	편	콘슈머	편 슈머	1
110	박	플	박 플	11
111	트래시	태그	트래시 태그	152
112	마피아	포비아	마피아 포비아	4
113	마이크로	테러	마이크로 테러	6
114	리플레이	어택	리플레이 어택	4

No.	English word	English word	Compound word	Frequency
115	랜섬	디도스	랜섬 디도스	13
116	라테 테크	테크노로기	라테 테크	5
117	라돈	포비아	라돈 포비아	61
118	도그	포비아	도그 포비아	40
119	데이터	데브옵스	데이터 옵스	23
120	더티	커피	더티 커피	21
121	더스트	포비아	더스트 포비아	7
122	더블	케어족	더블 케어족	9
123	노	머니족	노 머니족	33
124	내셔널	굿즈	내셔널 굿즈	14
125	나노	테라피 다이아그노시스	나노 테라그노시스	9
126	인싸이더	아이템	인싸 템	1,046
127	트래시	태그	트래시 태그	152
128	베이핑	룸	베이핑 룸	138
129	스피드	팩토어	스피드 팩토어	131
130	카멜레온	존	카멜레 존	126
131	인싸이더	실버	인싸 실버	59
132	얼씨	룩	얼씨 룩	55
133	소프트	패션	소프트 패션	40
134	다크	넷지	다크 넷지	29
135	타맥	딜레이	타맥 딜레이	26
136	배너티	플레이트	배너티 플레이트	3
137	벌크	머니	벌크 머니	4
138	비타민	베이퍼	비타민 베이퍼	18
139	스타일	테크노로기	스타일 테크	153
140	스타트업	로 펌	스타트업 로펌	4
141	실버	인싸이더	실버 인싸	6
142	싱글	아이템	싱글 템	6
142	오렌지	영	오렌지 영	9
143	오피스	오피스	오피스 빌런	19
144	요가	링	요가 링	10

No.	English word	English word	Compound word	Frequency
145	웍	박스	웍 박스	21
146	갓	유투버	갓투버	26
147	겔스	엑스플레인	겔스 플레인	3
148	게스트 하우스	포비아	게하 포비아	11
149	겜	테크노로기	겜 테크	3

English+Native

No.	English word	English word	Compound word	Frequency
150	에바	참치	에바 참치	27
151	시니어	엄지족	시니어 엄지족	3
152	폰	라니	폰 라니	3
153	미 투	운동	미투 운동	20
154	인싸이더	력	인싸 력	426
155	인싸이더	춤	인싸 춤	196
156	인싸이더	용어	인싸 용어	83
157	베이핑	카페	베이핑 카페	7
158	아파트먼트	줍줍족	아파트 줍줍족	3
159	좀비	사슴병	좀비 사슴병	18

English+Sino

No.	English word	English word	Compound word	Frequency
160	이모티콘	체	이모티콘 체	3
161	유팀	불패	유팀 불패	6
162	유니콘	대학	유니콘 대학	3
163	오토 척살	척살	오토 척살	3
164	언컨택트	소비	언택트 소비	41
165	언컨택트	기술	언택트 기술	84
166	핀난치열 테크노로기	혁신법	핀테크 혁신법	5
167	아마존	공포증	아마존 공포증	3
168	프로페셔널	통학러	프로 통학러	26
169	프로페셔널	사망러	프로 사망러	3

No.	English word	English word	Compound word	Frequency
170	스모그	제거탑	스모그 제거탑	12
171	스마트	번역	스마트 번역	4
172	쇼 윈도	취준생	쇼윈도 취준생	73
173	셀럽브리터	병	셀럽 병	23
174	비트코인	페인	비트 페인	3
175	비트코인	우울증	비트코인 우울증	15
176	비주얼	각	비주얼 각	4
177	브로더	문화	브로 문화	8
178	뷰 세	권	뷰세 권	5
179	팬	조어	팬 조어	12
180	무브	병	무브 병	157
181	트럭	기소	트럭 기소	16
182	맘	조어	맘 조어	3
183	로봇	시민권자	로봇 시민권자	16
184	런	예인	런 예인	9
185	톤	궁예	톤 궁예	1
186	니트	비용	니트 비용	12
187	노	더스트족	노 더스트족	35
188	노 노	포미족	노노 포미족	4
189	밀레니얼	가족	밀레니얼 가족	300
190	팔로	인	팔로 인	72
191	파이어	족	파이어 족	90
192	파이	세대	파이 세대	64
193	엠제트	세대	엠제트 세대	50
194	폴	여비	폴 여비	38
195	디졸브	노동	디졸브 노동	28
196	화이트	사업자	화이트 사업자	23
197	라돈	대리석	라돈 대리석	21
198	셀카	력	셀카 력	17
199	셀프 해피의	법칙	셀피의 법칙	18

No.	English word	English word	Compound word	Frequency
200	스위치	분자	스위치 분자	2
201	스텔스	차선	스텔스 차선	4
202	실버	돌아오다 싱글	실버 돌싱	3
203	요도	족	요도 족	6
204	웰빙	다선	웰빙 다선	16
205	제트	주사	제트 주사	18
206	게이트	권	게이트 권	48
207	골프 세	권	골세 권	3

Native+Native

No.	Native word	Native word	Compound word	Frequency
208	장거리	통학러	장거리 통학러	13
209	잠자리	말	잠자리 말	3
210	쓰레기	덕후	쓰레기 덕후	6
211	수호랑	얹이	수호랑 얹이	3
212	소매	넣기	소매 넣기	24
213	소리	양념	소리 양념	5
214	보작	거리다	보작 거리다	5
215	쓰앵	님	쓰앵 님	1,646
216	토착	왜구	토착 왜구	538
217	필	환경	필 환경	398
218	스앵	님	스앵 님	148
219	무	정찰제	무 정찰제	52
220	흙친	수저	흙친 수저	41
221	실감	세대	실감 세대	29
222	맵	덕후	맵 덕후	3
223	맵	찢이	맵 찢이	8
224	개	딸	개 딸	3
225	치치	딱	치치 딱	7
226	한류	호미	한류 호미	16

Sino+Native

No.	Sino word	Native word	Compound word	Frequency
227	연어	바닷이	연어 바닷이	10
228	송리단	길	송리단 길	219
229	퇴사	짤	퇴사 짤	9
230	동리단	길	동리단 길	47
231	찐	사랑	찐 사랑	6
232	영혼	보내기	영혼 보내기	351
233	호떡	보트	호떡 보트	38
234	반깐	머리	반깐 머리	9
235	사물	높임	사물 높임	7
236	상자	깡	상자 깡	3
237	완	깐	완 깐	10
238	월급	팅 통장	월급 텡장	5
239	고집	살	고집 살	5
240	최적화	카페	최적화 카페	5

Sino+Sino

No.	Sino word	Sino word	Compound word	Frequency
241	재판	치사	재판 치사	3
242	재벌	가맹점	재벌 가맹점	104
243	자아	신경증	자아 신경증	4
244	입퇴	양난	입퇴 양난	5
245	우주	공강	우주 공강	3
246	필요한	환경	필 환경	398
247	피해 미세 먼지	여행지	피미 여행지	3
248	피해 미세 먼지	여행	피미 여행	63
249	시어머니	상사	시 상사	5
250	시간제한	섭취법	시간제한 섭취법	13
251	소아성	치매	소아성 치매	5
252	소비	요정	소비 요정	825
253	상사	병	상사 병	3

No.	Sino word	Sino word	Compound word	Frequency
254	살충	란	살충 란	9
255	사무직	공장	사무직 공장	3
256	사무실	지박령	사무실 지박령	33
257	부포	족	부포 족	10
258	병주	선행	병주 선행	4
259	편의점 셀러드	족	편셀 족	17
260	편의점 디저트	족	편디 족	41
261	백골	선	백골 선	7
262	반반차	휴가제	반반차 휴가제	11
263	문화 센터	족	문센 족	13
264	무세	권	무세 권	3
265	무 의미	세대	무민 세대	78
266	모부성	보호	모부성 보호	5
267	명예	과세	명예 과세	5
268	독감	공구	독감 공구	4
269	대안	관계	대안 관계	29
270	단체 톡	지옥	단톡 지옥	4
271	단체 톡	야근	단톡 야근	8
272	남탕	예능	남탕 예능	11
273	급여	체	급여 체	82
274	근육	저금	근육 저금	6
275	근육	잔고	근육 잔고	8
276	궁예	력	궁예 력	14
277	관광객	혐오증	관광객 혐오증	6
278	과로	노인	과로 노인	44
279	곤룡포	계보	곤룡포 계보	13
280	고독	방	고독 방	26
281	고도	가공식품	고도 가공식품	17
282	찐	우정	찐 우정	25
283	주사	난민	주사 난민	10
284	감정	대리인	감정 대리인	89

No.	Sino word	Sino word	Compound word	Frequency
285	피해 미세 먼지	여행	피미 여행	63
286	생리	빈곤	생리 빈곤	51
287	성장	우위국	성장 우위국	40
288	등용	곡	등용 곡	37
289	수평	어	수평 어	37
290	자해	계	자해 계	35
291	찢	우정	찢 우정	25
292	실업	부조법	실업 부조법	24
293	무전	무업	무전 무업	3
294	무전	재난	무전 재난	6
295	무	정찰제	무 정찰제	52
296	복 불	법안	복불 법안	12
297	불일치	질환	불일치 질환	2
298	삼신	가전	삼신 가전	3
299	상권	역전	상권 역전	4
300	생존	가전	생존 가전	4
301	서점	민폐족	서점 민폐족	4
302	세대	형평론	세대 형평론	6
303	신경	미세사	신경 미세사	3
304	오탈	제	오탈 제	16
305	의식하	개두술	의식하 개두술	5
306	임신	하청	임신 하청	6
307	제설기	부모	제설기 부모	11
308	갑	대출	갑 대출	6
309	갑 질	출장	갑질 출장	64
310	개선	현실	개선 현실	35
311	개화	사막	개화 사막	16
312	결심	도서	결심 도서	11
313	최조	기술	최조 기술	6