

## SYLLABLE STRUCTURE PROCESSES IN KUSAAL LOANWORD ADAPTATION

### Abstract

This paper describes syllable structure processes in loanword adaptation in Kusaal, a Mabia language that is spoken in Northern Ghana. Even though Kusaal is a CVC language, consonant clusters are not allowed in the language. Thus, loanwords with consonant clusters or sequences of consonants at syllable boundary have to be modified based on the syllable structure of Kusaal. The study therefore, seeks to describe the syllable structure processes that are employed in the adaptation of English words with consonant clusters to Kusaal. These processes will be formalised within an optimality theory, which was propounded by Prince and Smolensky (1993). An optimality theory is a surface-based linguistic theory that was propounded to address phonological challenges posed by earlier theories. Data was collected from both primary and secondary sources. The primary data was elicited from 25 consultants through picture name and description. While secondary data was collected from Kusaal dictionary. The findings show that vowel epenthesis and consonant deletion are the major syllable structure processes used to ensure that English words with complex syllable structures conform to the syllable structure of Kusaal. It was also observed that vowel epenthesis repairs onset and coda clusters. Examples include /spi:kə/ ‘speaker’, /kɔŋ.kri:t/ ‘concrete’, /sɔks/ ‘socks’ and /bʌlb/ ‘bulb’, which are simplified as [si.pi.ka], [kɔŋ.ki.ret], [sɔ.gʊs] and [bɔ.lɔb] respectively. It is also argued that the choice of the epenthetic vowel is determined by vowel harmony and backness. Moreover, it was realised that marked consonants and consonants with low sonority undergo deletion while consonants with high sonority or perceptually salient are preserved. Thus, the syllable structure processes that characterise Kusaal loanword adaptation are governed by the phonology of Kusaal.

**Key words:** Kusaal, Mabia, loanword, vowel epenthesis, consonant deletion, optimality theory

**Authors:** Lawrence Sandow and Helen Atipoka Adongo

### References

Prince, A., & Smolensky, P. (1993). *Optimality theory: Constraint interaction in generative grammar*. Ms. Rutgers University, New Brunswick NJ and University of Colorado, Boulder.