In English, no phonotactic restrictions are imposed on syllable-initial glide-vowel (GV) combinations; all 24 logically possible GV sequences occur (G = w, j; V = i, e, ə, æ, u, u, o, ɔ, a). In Korean, on the other hand, among the 14 logically possible GV sequences (G = w, j; V = i, e, ə, æ, u, o, ɔ, a), only nine occur; the following are absent: *ji, *jɨ, *wu, *wɨ, *wo. Phonologists (e.g., Sohn 1987, Lee 1998) have argued that this gap in Korean is due to the homorganicity of the glide and the vowel in these GV sequences. Researchers (e.g., Jang and Cho 2005, Kim and Lotto 2004) have asserted that this phonotactic difference between the two languages constitutes the source of difficulty for Korean ESL learners in acquiring, in particular, the English GV sequences, wu, ji, wu, ji, wo.

In this thesis, I first provide detailed phonological and phonetic accounts concerning the glides, vowels, and GV sequences of monolingual English and Korean speakers. Then, I acoustically examine 22 Korean ESL learners’ L2 production data. The learners resort to repair strategies including Glide Deletion (/wund/ → [und]), Glottal Stop Replacement (/jist/ → [?ist]), Vowel Shift (/wook/ → [wɔk]), and Glide Shift (/jip/ → [wip]). Finally, I propose an Optimality Theoretic account for the learners’ L2 data. I argue that the markedness constraints DISTINCT GLIDE (Rubach 2002) and DISTINCT GLIDE(F) are responsible for the GV gap in Korean; demotion of these constraints below faithfulness constraints of the IDENT-IO(F) family is crucial for Korean ESL learners to acquire the target English GV sequences.