

## THE IMPORTANCE OF CORRECT PRONUNCIATION IN THE KOREAN LANGUAGE AND PRONUNCIATION PROBLEMS

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**Abstract.** *This article examines the theoretical and practical aspects of the Korean pronunciation system. Particular attention is paid to consonants and vowels, tense consonants, phonetic assimilation, intonation, and pronunciation rules. The study also analyzes the major pronunciation difficulties faced by learners of Korean as a foreign language and suggests possible solutions. Through various examples, the communicative importance of accurate pronunciation, its role in cultural adaptation, and effective methods of improving pronunciation skills are discussed. The findings of the study may serve as a theoretical basis for developing textbooks and methodological materials for Korean language learners.*

**Keywords:** *Pronunciation, phonetics, phonology, Korean language, tense consonants, assimilation, intonation, pronunciation education, Korean as a foreign language, phonemes.*

**Аннотация.** *В данной статье рассматриваются теоретические и практические аспекты системы произношения корейского языка. Особое внимание уделяется согласным и гласным звукам, напряжённым согласным, фонетической ассимиляции, интонации и правилам произношения. Также анализируются основные трудности произношения, с которыми сталкиваются изучающие корейский язык как иностранный, и предлагаются возможные пути их решения. На различных примерах обсуждается коммуникативная значимость правильного произношения, его роль в культурной адаптации и эффективные методы совершенствования произносительных навыков. Результаты исследования могут служить теоретической основой для разработки учебников и методических материалов для изучающих корейский язык.*

**Ключевые слова:** *произношение, фонетика, фонология, корейский язык, напряжённые согласные, ассимиляция, интонация, обучение произношению, корейский как иностранный язык, фонемы.*

**Introduction.** The Korean language has seen a sharp rise in popularity throughout the world in the age of globalization. The Republic of Korea's economic, technological, and cultural advancements have resulted in an increasing number of overseas students studying Korean. Young people are particularly motivated to learn Korean due to the popularity of K-pop, Korean dramas, and Korean culture. Pronunciation has become one of the most difficult parts of learning a language, nevertheless, because Korean's phonetic system is very different from many other languages.

Korean has a distinct phonological system and is an agglutinative language. Consonant clusters, assimilation processes, complex syllable structures, and a three-way differentiation between plain, tense, and aspirated consonants are all part of the pronouncing system. Furthermore, international learners have additional challenges due to the discrepancies between written forms and actual pronunciation.

**Literature Review.** Research on Korean pronunciation shows that the Korean sound system is phonologically complex due to its three-way consonant distinction, assimilation processes, and context-dependent pronunciation changes (Sohn, 2001; Lee & Ramsey, 2011). Scholars note that these features make Korean difficult for foreign learners whose native languages do not have similar phonetic systems.

In Korean language education, researchers emphasize the importance of explicit pronunciation teaching combined with listening and imitation practice (Kim, 2010; Park, 2003). Studies also show that learners often struggle with tense consonants, assimilation rules, and intonation patterns due to the absence of equivalent sounds in their first languages (Brown, 2011).

Recent works highlight the effectiveness of modern technologies, such as AI-based applications, in improving pronunciation skills through real-time feedback. Overall, literature suggests that Korean pronunciation learning requires systematic phonetic training and continuous practice.

**Research Methodology.** This study employs a qualitative research approach to analyze the phonological structure of the Korean language and the pronunciation difficulties experienced by Uzbek learners. The research is based on descriptive, comparative, and analytical methods.

First, the descriptive method is used to explain the main features of the Korean pronunciation system, including consonants, vowels, assimilation processes, and intonation patterns. Special attention is given to tense, plain, and aspirated consonants, as well as phonological changes in connected speech.

Second, the comparative method is applied to identify differences between Korean and Uzbek phonetic systems. This helps to explain why Uzbek learners face difficulties in producing certain Korean sounds such as tense consonants (ㄱ, ㄷ, ㅃ, ㄴ, ㅆ) and vowel combinations that do not exist in Uzbek.

Third, the analytical method is used to examine common pronunciation errors and their linguistic causes. Examples from real Korean speech and learner performance are analyzed to determine patterns of mispronunciation and assimilation errors.

In addition, the study incorporates literature analysis of existing works in Korean phonology and foreign language teaching methodology. Scholarly sources are reviewed to support theoretical explanations and to identify effective pronunciation teaching strategies.

Overall, this methodology allows for a comprehensive investigation of both the structural features of Korean pronunciation and the pedagogical challenges faced by foreign learners, particularly Uzbek students.

**Analysis and Results.** For example, some words are pronounced differently from how they are written:

한국말 → [한궁말]

같이 → [가치]

읽다 → [익따]

없습니다 → [업썸니다]

The intricacy of the Korean pronunciation system is demonstrated by these phonetic variations. Not only is pronunciation a phonetic process, but it also plays a major role in

the effectiveness of communication. Misunderstandings, communication difficulties, and issues with cultural adaption might result from incorrect pronunciation. As a result, when teaching Korean, pronunciation needs particular attention.

This article's goals are to conduct a scientific analysis of the Korean pronunciation system, identify the main issues with pronunciation, and suggest practical solutions.

**Characteristics of the Korean Phonetic System.** The phonetic system of the Korean language is extremely complicated, consisting of 21 vowels and 19 consonants. For foreign learners, the three-way differentiation between consonants is particularly challenging.

### Plain, Tense, and Aspirated Consonants

Korean consonants are classified as follows:

Plain	Tense	Aspirated
ㄱ	ㄲ	ㅋ
ㄷ	ㄸ	ㅌ
ㅂ	ㅃ	ㅍ
ㅈ	ㅉ	ㅊ

Examples:

달 [tal] — moon

딸 [ttal] — daughter

탈 [thal] — mask

These words differ in meaning depending on pronunciation. Even a slight pronunciation mistake may completely change the meaning.

Another example:

불 [pul] — fire

뿔 [ppul] — horn

풀 [phul] — grass

Since such phonemic distinctions do not exist in Uzbek, learners often pronounce these sounds incorrectly.

**Assimilation and Pronunciation Changes.** Assimilation is a highly dynamic phonological phenomenon in Korean. Sounds interact with one another during pronunciation to create forms that are different from written spelling.

### Nasal Assimilation

Examples:

국물 → [궁물]

한국말 → [한궁말]

백만 → [뱅만]

In these examples, the consonant ㄱ changes into a nasal-like sound [ŋ] due to neighboring nasal consonants.

### Lateral Assimilation

설날 → [설랄]

신라 → [실라]

**Tensification.** In some cases, plain consonants become tense consonants:

학교 → [학꾜]

식당 → [식땅]

국밥 → [국뽵]

Lack of knowledge about these pronunciation rules often makes learners' speech sound unnatural.

**Vowel System and Diphthongs.** The Korean vowel system is also highly complex. Diphthongs, in particular, present difficulties for foreign learners.

Main Diphthongs

ㅏ (wa)

ㅜ (wo)

ㅡ (ui)

ㅣ (wi)

Examples:

왜 [we]

의사 [의사 / 이사]

귀 [kwi]

Especially, the vowel “ㅡ” is pronounced differently depending on context:

- 의자 → [의자]
- 회의 → [회의 / 웨이]
- 나의 → [나에]

This variability creates additional challenges for learners.

### The Importance of Correct Pronunciation in Korean

**1. Clarity in Communication.** Correct pronunciation is a key factor in successful communication. Mispronunciation can easily lead to misunderstandings.

Examples:

코피 — nosebleed

커피 — coffee

배 — pear

배 — stomach

배 — ship

The meanings of these words are distinguished through pronunciation and context.

Another example:

눈 [nun] — eye

눈 [nun] — snow

If intonation or context is incorrect, confusion may occur.

**2. Listening Comprehension.** Learners who master pronunciation are better able to understand spoken Korean. This is because real Korean speech often differs from written forms.

Examples:

좋아요 → [조아요]

먹는 → [멍는]

같이 가요 → [가치 가요]

Students who only memorize spelling often struggle to understand natural speech.

**3. Cultural Adaptation.** Pronunciation is highly valued in Korean society. Incorrect pronunciation may sometimes create awkward situations.

Examples:

아저씨 — middle-aged man

아가씨 — young lady

Because these expressions sound somewhat similar, incorrect pronunciation may lead to communicative discomfort.

### Pronunciation Problems Faced by Uzbek Learners

**1. Difficulty with Tense Consonants.** Uzbek does not contain tense consonants such as ㄱ, ㄷ, ㅂ, ㅅ, and ㅈ.

As a result, learners often make mistakes such as:

딸 → 달

빵 → 방

싸다 → 사다

These errors may completely change the meaning of words.

### 2. Pronunciation of “ㄹ”

The Korean consonant ㄹ is pronounced either as [r] or [l] depending on its position.

Examples:

라면 [ramyeon]

물 [mul]

사람 [saram]

This sound is particularly difficult for Uzbek learners.

**3. Intonation Problems.** Many learners pronounce Korean using Uzbek intonation patterns, which reduces the naturalness of their speech.

Examples:

괜찮아요?

진짜예요?

어디 가요?

Incorrect intonation may make speech sound unnatural or impolite.

### Methods for Improving Pronunciation

**1. Shadowing Method.** Students listen to native speakers and immediately repeat what they hear. This method improves pronunciation and intonation.

**2. Minimal Pair Exercises.** These exercises help learners distinguish between similar sounds.

Examples:

달 — 딸

밭 — 빨

자다 — 짜다

**3. Audio Recording and Self-Analysis.** Students can record their speech, listen to it, identify mistakes, and improve problematic areas.

**4. Using Korean Dramas and Podcasts.** Exposure to authentic Korean speech helps learners improve pronunciation naturally.

**5. Working with Phonetic Transcription.** Using IPA symbols or Korean phonetic notation can help learners understand pronunciation more accurately.

### The Role of Modern Technology in Pronunciation Education

Today, AI-based pronunciation learning programs are widely used. Examples include: Naver Papago; Talk To Me In Korean; Cake; Teuida.

These tools evaluate students' pronunciation and offer helpful criticism. Students can also independently practice pronunciation outside of the classroom by using mobile applications.

**Conclusion.** In conclusion, foreign learners have significant difficulties due to the intricate phonological and phonetic features of the Korean pronunciation system. It takes a lot of practice to perfect assimilation, diphthongs, intonation, and tense consonants in particular.

Accurate pronunciation boosts listening comprehension, increases communication efficacy, and makes cultural adaptation easier. As a result, when teaching Korean, pronunciation should be given particular methodological consideration. The quality of Korean pronunciation instruction will be considerably enhanced in the future by the

efficient application of contemporary technologies, multimedia materials, and AI-based pronunciation tools.

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