

KOREAN LANGUAGE: HISTORY, CULTURE, AND COMPARISON TO ENGLISH

By: Cultural and Linguistic Diversity Task Force Members

The Cultural and Linguistic Diversity Corner was created in an effort to provide information and respond to questions on cultural and linguistic diversity. Questions are answered by members of the Texas Speech-Language-Hearing Association (TSHA) Cultural and Linguistic Diversity (CLD) Task Force. Members for the 2011-2012 year include **Ellen Stubbe Kester**, PhD, CCC-SLP (co-chair); **Margarita Limon-Ordonez**, MS, CCC-SLP (co-chair); **M. Ruth Fernandez**, PhD, CCC-SLP; **Rachel Aghara**, PhD, CCC-SLP; **Lisa Carver**, MA, CCC-SLP; **Tracey Gray**, MA, CCC-SLP; **Scott Prath**, MA, CCC-SLP; **Ivan Mejia**, MA, CCC-SLP; and **Sarah Panjwani**, BA. Submit your questions to ellen.kester@bilinguistics.com. Look for responses from the CLD Task Force on TSHA's website and in the *Communicologist*.

History

Approximately 75 million people speak Korean as a first language, and at least five million of those live outside of Korea (McLeod, 2007). Among the many theories of the origin of the Korean language, two prominent views are the Southern theory and the Northern theory. According to the Southern theory, the Korean people and language originated in the South Pacific region and the Korean language may be related to the Dravidian languages of India or to the Austronesian languages of Southeast Asia and the Pacific (Kim, 1987). The Northern theory is the view that Korean is related to the Altaic family, which includes the Turkic, Mongolic, and Tungus-Mauchu languages (McLeod, 2007).

The ancient Korean language is divided into two dialects: the Puyo language and the Han language. When the Korean peninsula was unified by Silla in the seventh century, the Han language became the dominant dialect and has since been considered a standard dialect. Today, there are officially two standard dialects existing in Korea. One is the Seoul dialect in South Korea, and the other is the Phyong'yang dialect in North Korea.

The alphabetic script (Han'gul) for writing Korean was introduced by King Sejong in the 15th century. Prior to the existence of the Korean script, only Chinese characters were used for the purpose of writing. Chinese characters, however, could not depict the living language spoken by the Korean people, who were meaning-based, since the grammar of classical Chinese did not have any connection with Korean grammar. Even after the Korean script was invented, Chinese characters were continuously used as the main means of writing until the 20th century.

The use of Chinese characters led to more than half of Korean words being Chinese-originated loanwords. At the end of the 19th century, there was a movement to restore native Korean culture. The government proclaimed that the official governmental documents would be written

both in Korean script and Chinese characters. At this point, the first newspapers and magazines were published in Korean script, and the use of the Korean alphabet expanded. In the early 20th century, more systematic studies on the Korean language were started, and a few scholars published Korean grammar books. However, the active study of Korean grammar was discontinued owing to the Japanese colonial policy suppressing the study of Korean (Kim, 1987).

After World War II, Korea was divided into two countries, and the South and the North implemented different language policies. This has resulted in drastically different written and spoken forms of Korean. In the South, the Korean alphabet and Chinese characters are used, while in the North, there is no instruction in Chinese characters, and they are not used in newspapers, magazines, or books.

Culture and Language

Koreans follow the Confucian tradition of communicating with others according to hierarchical relationships. The primary determinant of the hierarchical relationships is age. From a Korean cultural perspective, requesting information about age, marital status, job position, and wealth is acceptable and determines which language form one should use. Women use a softer tone than men and often introduce themselves as one's wife or mother before providing their own name.

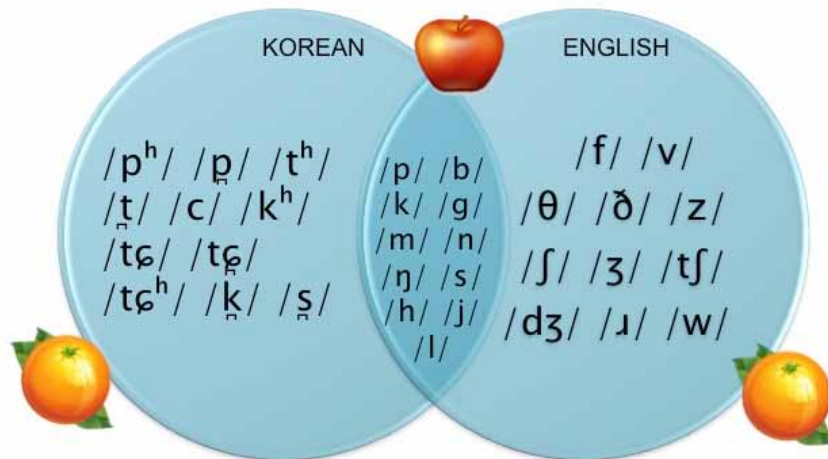
Important aspects of the assessment process and intervention are strongly influenced by culture. For example, the way children play varies by culture. As an example, Farver and colleagues found that Korean preschool children engaged in parallel play more frequently than pretend play and that they initiated play less frequently than their Anglo-American peers (Farver, Kim, and Lee, 1995; Farver and Shinn, 1997). Such differences across culture can lead to inaccurate conclusions if not considered.

Another cultural difference is the calculation of age. When a Korean child is born, he is considered to be one year old. Thus, Korean age is one year older than standard chronological age.

Phonology

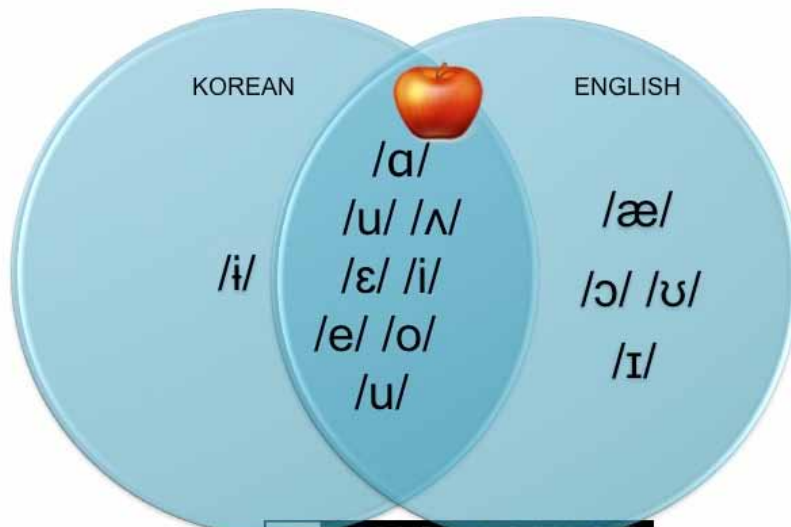
Korean phonology includes up to 21 consonants and eight to

Korean Consonant Phonemes



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Korean Vowel Phonemes



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10 vowels, depending on dialect. Phonemes vary according to dialect. There are four to six regional dialects, most of which are not drastically different from one another. Consonants generally consist of plosives, nasals, fricatives, a glide, and a liquid. Several consonant classes have up to three variations of place. For example, there are three bilabial stops /p, p̚, pʰ/, three alveolar stops /t, t̚, tʰ/, and three velar stops /k, k̚, kʰ/. The Korean consonant and vowel phonemes, contrasted with English, are included in the charts below. English and Korean share 13 consonant phonemes, but there are 11 English phonemes that do not exist in Korean. Korean speakers learning

English often interchange /ɪ/ and /I/ and may also nasalize final stops if they appear prior to a nasal sound (Cheng, 1991).

Phonotactics

In Korean, all consonants may occur in syllable-initial position, except for /ŋ/. Only seven consonants occur in syllable-final position: /p, t, k, m, n, ŋ, l/. Fricatives and affricates do not appear in word-final position. Thus, a word such as “bath” might be pronounced “bat.” Consonant clusters only occur in intersyllabic positions and are not allowed in initial or final syllable positions.

Korean consists of about seven monophthongs and 10 diphthongs. Diphthongs are monophthongs combined with the semivowels /j/, /w/, and /u/. Korean words often have stress on the first syllable; however, stress is not used to differentiate word meaning. Therefore, Korean speakers learning English may use monotone stress.

Age of Acquisition

Korean children typically acquire all consonants except liquid /l/ and alveolar fricatives /s, ʒ/ by three years of age. Bilabial consonants /p/ and alveolars /t/ are acquired relatively earlier than velars /k/, and stops are acquired earlier than affricates. The liquid /l/ is acquired by five years of age, and alveolar fricatives begin to develop at four to five years of age and are generally mastered by five or six years of age. Syllable initial speech sounds are acquired by two to three years of age, and syllable-final speech sounds are acquired by ages three to four (Kim and Pae, 2005; Pae, 1995).

Like English speakers, Korean children in the process of acquiring Korean phonology use phonological processes that result from motor constraints. Kim (2006) identified phonological processes used by more than 10 percent of late 2-year-olds, including reduplication, final consonant deletion, intersyllabic cluster simplification, tensing or deaspiration, velar fronting, nasalization or stopping of liquids, liquid simplification, affrication or palatalization, stopping of fricatives and affricatives, and interdentalization of fricatives (Kim, 1996; Kim and Pae, 2005; Oum, 1994; Pae, 1995).

Language Structure

The most common sentence structure in Korean is subject-object-verb. Word order is more flexible than in English, but the verb is required to stay at the end of a sentence. Similar to English, modifiers typically precede the noun. Similar to German, Korean is an agglutinative language, indicating that morphemes are joined together. Due to this property, one word could represent a complete sentence. Articles and gender are not used in Korean.

While in English words are inverted to create a question, Korean utilizes stress to differentiate questions and statements. This is similar to Spanish, which uses a rising final intonation to denote a question, rather than changing word order.

Information provided in this article serves to assist in the differentiation of linguistic differences versus disordered behaviors to decrease the possibility of a misdiagnosis secondary to characteristics associated with cultural differences or second language-learning behaviors. ★

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Websites with Cultural and Linguistics Information about Korean

Korea 4 Expats: www.korea4expats.com/article-people-culture.html

<http://koreanalyst.wordpress.com/2009/01/09/the-korean-learner-of-english-english-korean-cross-linguistic-challenges>