This book is a complete guide for people who want to learn the Korean language, starting from the very beginning, and learn the alphabet and the correct sounds of vowels, consonants, and diphthongs. It was written for people who want an easy but systematic approach to the language. The writer is a non-native speaker who started learning the language from ZERO, just like you and spent years in Korea trying to reach a better level of proficiency in Korean. After a few weeks of study, you will start to recognize words, make sentences, and have simple (but miraculous) conversations with other Korean speakers!
Author’s Note
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Studying a new language is, without doubt, a challenging task, but at the same time, it is the most effective tool in our human hands to bring about peace in the world. It enables us to take a look inside other cultures and civilizations, get to know people from different backgrounds, and understand others and ourselves a little more deeply.

Studying the Korean language is even more challenging and fascinating than studying other languages. Korea has an ancient culture. Over the centuries, it has—amazingly—been able to mix all the influences coming from Central Asia, the Steppes, Manchuria, China, Japan, and the West into a beautiful, brilliant, and unique new culture. This cultural richness has affected the Korean language, following a very long process of adoption and establishment of new terms, sounds, and expressions coming from abroad. And even if the vocabulary of the language is already boundless, new generations of Koreans continue to create and add new words (neologisms) day by day. In this way, they update their language to reflect new trends and new social phenomena. It is difficult to find another language in the world that is as creative and innovative as Korean.

However, this makes Korean a very difficult language to learn, above all for people whose mother language is neither Chinese nor Japanese. It takes years to become fluent and pronounce the language well enough to be understood. But don’t be discouraged. After a few weeks of study, you will start to recognize words, make sentences, and have simple (but miraculous) conversations with other Korean speakers! (At the very beginning, it will be quite humiliating, but this is part of the game we decided to play.) Understanding the words to Korean songs, dramas, and movies will be the next step.

This book is a complete guide for people who want to learn the language, starting from the very beginning, and learn the alphabet and the correct sounds of vowels,
consonants, and diphthongs. It was written for people who want an easy but systematic approach to the language. The writer is a non-native speaker (me!) who started learning the language from ZERO, just like you and spent years in Korea trying to reach a better level of proficiency.

Don’t forget. The language you are going to study using this book, the people who speak it, and the culture that produced it are AMAZING. It is important that you remember that while studying this language. By reading the pages of the book, working through the exercises, and memorizing the words step by step, you will be forging your keys to the doors of Korean culture.

Andrea De Benedittis
From a messy room in Venice, 2016
1. This book is divided into fourteen units. The first three deal with the Korean alphabet (vowels, consonants, and diphthongs), sounds, and phonology, and explain the main features of the language (verbs, linguistic protocol, particles, punctuation marks, and the lexicon).

2. Some simple grammatical elements will be introduced from Unit 4. Each unit has a cover page featuring the main words used in that unit. Unlike many other Korean textbooks, this one begins with the formal level of speech. We have chosen to begin this way because verbs follow a more regular conjugation pattern; therefore, it is easier for beginners to understand.

3. Every unit begins with a short text, which introduces and contextualizes the grammar points examined in that unit. Finally, each unit contains a section providing an in-depth analysis of the grammar points taught in that unit, as well as exercises for practice.

4. To download the MP3 files, go to http://www.seoulselection.com/bookstore and search for Korean Language for Beginners.
5. In the appendix you can find the solutions to all the exercises in the book, conjugation tables, more detailed explanations on the usage of the topic and subject particles, and a guide to writing emails in Korean.

6. The book flaps are useful, as they contain tables summarizing the main content throughout the book.

Symbols and abbreviations

- 📞 additional information
- 🎧 listening track
- 🗒️ expression to memorize
- ⚠️ note: grammatical note
- 🚨 difficult exception
- 🔞 clarification

In this book, Korean words have been transliterated in accordance with the revised romanization of Korean.

Acknowledgments

This book wouldn’t have been possible without the constant help of relatives, friends, and colleagues. We owe a special thank you to Giuseppe Pappalardo for all the remarks on linguistic terms, to “Professors” Calvetti and Riotto for all their precious advice. Giuseppina De Nicola contributed to the revision of the original version and Lee Sang Suk to the proofreading and adaptation of the Korean content. She also wrote the section titled “How to write an email,” and hers is the voice on the listening tracks. 감사합니다!
Main Characters

- 나 (me)
- 곰인형 (teddy bear)
- 세종대왕 (Great King Sejong)
- 양반탈 (mask of a noble)
- 친구 (friend)
- 어머니 (mother)
- 아버지 (father)
- 신인장 (cactus)
- 귀신 (ghost)
- 부네탈 (mask of lady)
- 돌하르방 (stone grandpa)
- 양반 (noble)
- 남자친구 (boyfriend)
- 여자친구 (girlfriend)
- 신부 (bride)
- 신랑 (groom)
- 눈사람 (snowman)
- 고릴라 (gorilla)
- 원앙 (mandarin duck or lovebird)
- 광대 (clown)
Unit 1

한글 1
Korean alphabet 1

Introduction
Vowels
Consonants 1

 Sounds and Vocabulary

Introduction

The Korean alphabet is a writing system created in 1443 and promulgated in 1446 during the reign of King Sejong, the fourth King of Joseon Dynasty (1392-1910). Originally considered “vulgar writing” (eonmun, 언문), it first began to be widely utilized and appreciated after Japanese colonization of the peninsula, when it became an instrument of self-determination against foreigners’ rule over Korean territory. The Korean alphabet is currently used in South Korea, where it is called Hangeul (한글, the term in this book); in North Korea, where it is called Joseongeul (조선글); and also by overseas Korean communities, mostly in China and the United States. Under a project abandoned in 2012, South Korea sought to export the alphabet abroad to provide a writing system to linguistic minorities lacking a proper writing system.

Its structure

The Chinese writing system is considered logographic. Korean also uses Hanja and Japanese uses Kanji, which would both be considered logographic. Japanese Hiragana, Katakana and Hangeul are all phonographic but that Hangeul has the distinction of also being phonocategorized.

Initially, the alphabet had twenty-eight main letters, which over time have been reduced to twenty-four. Eight are considered basic sounds, and from these derive all the other consonants and vowels. We must first distinguish between:

1. the five basic consonants [ㄱ, ㄴ, ㅁ, ㅅ, ㅇ] from which derive the fourteen simple consonants,

2. three basic vowels [ㅏ, ㅣ, ㅡ] from which derive the first ten, simple, or iotized, vowels.

From the fourteen simple consonants (ㄱ, ㄴ, ㄷ, ㄹ, ㅁ, ㅂ, ㅅ, ㅇ, ㅈ, ㅊ, ㅋ, ㅌ, ㅍ, ㅎ) are derived in turn five double consonants (ㄲ,ㄸ,ㅃ,ㅆ,ㅉ) and eleven complex
combinations (ㄳ, ㄵ, ㄶ, ㄺ, ㄻ, ㄼ, ㄽ, ㄾ, ㅀ, ㅄ). The ten simple vowels (ㅏ, ㅑ, ㅓ, ㅕ, ㅗ, ㅛ, ㅜ, ㅠ, ㅡ, ㅣ) are followed by four complex vowels (ㅐ, ㅒ, ㅔ, ㅖ) and seven diphthongs (ㅒ, ㅕ, ㅝ, ㅞ, ㅟ, ㅢ).

1 fourteen simple consonants

2 five double consonants
Unit 1

3. eleven complex combinations

4. ten simple vowels

5. four complex vowels

6. seven diphthongs
Korean writing is conceived in blocks representing syllables, each composed of an initial consonant, a (medial) vowel or a diphthong, and finally an ending composed of one or two consonants known as batchim. Consider the following examples:

How to write Korean syllables

Example 1
(C1 unvoiced + ) V

Example 2
C1 + V

Example 3
C1 + V + C2

Example 4
C1 + V + C2 + C3

Some pronunciation change if followed by this particle. The word batchim (받침, literally meaning “basis, support”) refers to consonants at the conclusion of a syllable. Not all syllable blocks have one; for instance, those in examples 1 and 2 don’t have any. Example 3 has one, and example 4 has a double batchim.
Vowels

The graphemes of Korean vowels are inspired by **three core elements** of Korean cosmology (heaven, man, earth), to which are respectively associated three graphic elements: a mark, a vertical line and a horizontal line.

In addition to the sounds they represent, therefore, the single vowels also lend philosophical significance to the words that they form.

If we combine these three elements together, we obtain the vowels of the Korean alphabet. The sun (heaven) combined with man brings the graphic formation of the vowelsㅏ andㅓ. The earth combined with the sun (heaven) brings the graphic formation of the vowelsㅗ andㅜ.

If a vowel depicts a man standing in front of a rising sun (ㅏ), or a sun rising on the earth (ㅗ) this means the vowel has a positive nuance and is considered a positive or **solar vowel**.

On the other hand, if the vowel depicts a man standing in front of a setting sun (ㅓ), or a sun under the earth (ㅜ), this implies a negative nuance, and the vowel is considered negative or **lunar**.

* Even if the vowelsㅣ andㅡ are considered neutral, they behave as lunar vowels. So do the complex vowelsㅔ,ㅐ,ㅖ,ㅐ andㅒ as these include the ㅓ vowel.
Now let’s try writing the first six vowels (a, eo, o, u, eu, i). Always pay attention to stroke order, which must be strictly respected when writing Korean.

Examples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Negative nuance</th>
<th>Positive nuance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>덥다 [deopta]: to be hot</td>
<td>따뜻하다 [ttatteutada]: to be warm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>더럽다 [deoreopta]: to be dirty</td>
<td>다람다 [darapta]: to be lightly dirty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>동동하다 [ttungttunghada]: to be fat</td>
<td>통통하다 [tongtonghada]: to be plump</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Let’s write!

- [a]
- [eo]
- [o]
- [u]
- [eu]
- [i]
When practicing the pronunciation of these vowels, pay attention to the next two points:

1. ㅓ is a broad “o”. Open your mouth wide and then pronounce the sound. When pronouncing ㅗ, you half-close your mouth, like in the drawing.

2. The ㅗ vowel corresponds the long “oo” sound found in “moon” and “too.” On the contrary, ㅡ has no exact equivalent in English. It is similar to a short “oo” sound (as in “cook” and “book”) but is pronounced without puckering the lips.

You must practice these two sounds, as a mispronunciation may change the meaning of a statement. Consider for example the verb kkuda (꾸다), which means “to dream” and which can easily be confused with the verb kkeuda (끄다), which means “to turn off.” If you mispronounce these sounds you may be misunderstood, as shown in the following examples:

**Examples**

검 [geom]: sword

커피 [keopi]: coffee

널다는 [neolda]: to hang

---

No vowel can be written alone in a syllabic block, but rather must always be accompanied by a consonant. When a syllable starts with a vowel, it must be preceded by the consonant ㅇ (ieung), which is unvoiced when it falls at the beginning of a syllable. That means that the vowels we have just learned are to be written like this:

아 (a), 어 (eo), 오 (o), 우 (u), 우 (eu), 이 (i)

Examples

오이 cucumber

아이 baby

이 tooth
This book is a complete guide for people who want to learn the Korean language, starting from the very beginning, and learn the alphabet and the correct sounds of vowels, consonants, and diphthongs. It was written for people who want an easy but systematic approach to the language. The writer is a non-native speaker who started learning the language from ZERO, just like you and spent years in Korea trying to reach a better level of proficiency in Korean. After a few weeks of study, you will start to recognize words, make sentences, and have simple (but miraculous) conversations with other Korean speakers!

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