

A STUDY ON TEACHING METHODS FOR KOREAN VOWELS AND CONSONANTS

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Abstract: *This study aims to explore teaching methods for Korean vowels and consonants, which are core elements in Korean language education, and to propose instructional strategies for effectively teaching pronunciation to foreign learners.*

Korean has a clear phonemic system, and specifically, the harmony of vowels and the articulatory positions of consonants act as major causes of pronunciation errors depending on the learner's native language.⁹ This research integrates phonological and pedagogical approaches to propose three teaching principles: visualization of articulators (조음기관의 시각화), step-by-step pronunciation training (단계별 발음 훈련), and the meaning-connection centered learning method (의미 연결 중심 학습법).

Keywords: *Vowels, Consonants, Pronunciation Education (발음 교육), Korean Language Education (한국어 교육), Articulators (조음기관), Phonetics (음성학), Speech Training (발화 훈련), Foreign Learners (외국인 학습자), Teaching Method (교수법), Language Acquisition (언어 습득)*

1. Need, Purpose, and Review of the Study

While the Korean language has a relatively simple phonemic system, learning correct pronunciation is one of the most difficult tasks for international learners one of the most difficult tasks for international learners.¹⁰ Specifically, learners whose native languages are English, Chinese, Japanese, or Vietnamese frequently show errors in distinguishing between vowel length (모음의 장단) or between aspirated and unaspirated consonants (자음의 유기음 - 무기음).

⁹. Lee Ki-moon. Study of Korean phonology. – Seoul : Taehaksa, 1994. – C. 45.

¹⁰. Kim Joo Won. Understanding Korean pronunciation.- Seoul : Park Yi Joong, 2018.- C.58..

These problems cannot be resolved through simple repetition drills; they require a teaching method that allows learners to understand the principles of articulation (조음 원리) and learn through experiential processes.

This study aims to:

- Analyze the phonological characteristics of the Korean vowel and consonant systems.
- Categorize pronunciation error types based on the learner's linguistic background.
- Propose efficient pronunciation teaching methods.
- Suggest practical application cases for real-world classroom settings.

Regarding previous research, Kim Juwon (2018) emphasized the effectiveness of visualization materials based on articulatory positions, and Lee Jeonghwa (2015) argued that a meaning-centered approach yields more sustainable learning effects than pronunciation correction alone.

In conclusion, Korean pronunciation education must evolve beyond simple phonetic imitation (음성 모방) into a teaching method that enables an understanding of articulatory principles. This study seeks to propose concrete methods for this advancement.

2. Principles of Vowel and Consonant Teaching Methods

The Korean vowel system does not depend merely on sound differences but on the position and movement of the articulators (조음기관). Korean basically has ten basic monophthongs (ㅏ, ㅑ, ㅓ, ㅕ, ㅗ, ㅛ, ㅜ, ㅠ, ㅡ, ㅣ), which are classified according to tongue height, tongue frontness/backness, and lip shape. If foreign learners study these sounds simply by listening and imitation without understanding these articulatory features (조음적 특징), it is difficult for them to distinguish subtle differences in sound.

Therefore, vowel instruction should proceed in the sequence of: Visualization of articulatory position (조음 위치의 시각화) → Auditory discrimination (청음) → Imitation (모방) → Correction (교정) → Meaning connection (의미 연결). For example, when teaching the difference between ‘ㅏ’ and ‘ㅓ’, it is effective to directly show the degree of lip rounding and have learners check their own lip shape using a mirror. This method provides visual feedback of the articulators, transforming pronunciation from simple imitation into embodied learning (신체 감각 기반 학습).¹¹

Furthermore, the concept of vowel harmony (모음 조화) must be taught concurrently. Vowel harmony is a unique Korean phonological phenomenon where vowels maintain a certain regularity within a word. Learners should visually understand the rules where

¹¹ Kim Joowon. Understanding Korean Phonology. - Seoul: Pajeong, 2018. - C.65.

preceding and following vowels harmonize, as seen in examples like ‘보다 - 보이다’ (to see - to be seen) or ‘밥 - 밥이’ (rice - rice-Subject marker). It is effective to simultaneously provide visual materials (lip shape diagrams, vocal cord position diagrams) and auditory materials (vowel contrast audio).

Recently, AI-based pronunciation correction systems have been developed to recognize learners' speech and provide real-time feedback on pronunciation accuracy. For instance, one method involves visualizing the spoken sound as a spectrogram and comparing it with the native speaker's formant curve.¹² Such technology provides immediate and individualized feedback to learners, accelerating vowel pronunciation improvement.

Phonemic awareness training is also important. Instead of simply memorizing the vowels ‘ㅏ - ㅑ - ㅓ - ㅕ - ㅗ - ㅛ - ㅜ - ㅠ’, learners should be trained to aurally discriminate pairs with semantic contrast, such as ‘가다’ (to go) - ‘거다’ (to be a big thing) - ‘고다’ (to stew). This meaning-centered approach leads to the integrated learning of pronunciation, vocabulary, and meaning.¹³

Korean consonants are classified by articulatory place (조음 위치: lips · alveolar · hard palate · velum) and articulatory manner (조음 방법: plosive · fricative · nasal · liquid). The core of consonant instruction is to systematically familiarize the learner with these articulatory principles. The representative triple contrast in Korean ‘ㄱ - ㅋ - ㆁ’, ‘ㄷ - ㅌ - ㄴ’, and ‘ㅂ - ㅍ - ㅃ’ is particularly difficult for foreign learners. These errors cannot be corrected by simple auditory practice and require training to experientially understand the intensity of the airflow and the tension of the vocal cords (공기의 세기와 성대의 긴장 정도). Recently, AR (Augmented Reality) pronunciation apps have been developed, allowing learners to visualize their internal mouth structure in real-time (입속 구조를 실시간으로 시각화).¹⁴ This technology is especially useful for learners who struggle with the ‘ㄴ’ sound (liquid). For example, it is preferable to have learners actually pronounce the consonant in a sentence like “빨리 달리다” (run fast) and learn it in connection with its meaning.

¹² LeeJeonghwa. Pronunciation training for foreigners. - Busan : Tone University Press, 2015. - C.128.

¹³ Choi Yoon-seok. Introduction to Articulatory Phonetics. - Daejeon: Hannam University Press, 2019. - C. 233.

¹⁴ Park Eungyong. Methods of teaching Korean pronunciation. - Seoul : History of Korean Culture, 2020. - C. 198.

Among Korean consonants, the final consonant pronunciation (종성 발음) is one of the most challenging parts for foreign learners. Therefore, when teaching final consonants, the principle of 'stopping the sound while closing the mouth' must be emphasized. Practicing contrasts such as ‘밥(rice) - 밤(chestnut) - 밖(outside) - 박 (gourd) - 발(foot) - 뭍(to step on)’ is effective for simultaneously training syllable boundary awareness (음절 경계 인식 능력).¹⁵

3. Practical Application of Pronunciation Instruction

Pronunciation instruction should not be a simple imitation process but an integrated process of cognition, articulation, and meaning (인지 - 조음 - 의미의 통합적 과정). For this purpose, this study proposes a four-stage instructional procedure:

- Perception (청음 단계): Learners listen sufficiently to the native speaker's pronunciation and recognize the rhythm and stress of the utterance. At this stage, utilizing voice analysis software (such as Praat) to show waveforms and spectrograms enhances learner comprehension.
- Articulation (조음 단계): Learners actively produce the sounds, using a mirror or video materials to check the movement of their articulators. The instructor must provide concrete explanations regarding the precise location of the articulators and the flow of air.
- Imitation & Correction (모방 및 교정 단계): Learners repeat the pronunciation while receiving feedback from the instructor or an AI program. Notably, recent AI Pronunciation Evaluators quantify pronunciation accuracy, helping learners improve independently.¹⁶
- Conclusion: These four stages reflect the principle of meaning-centered pronunciation instruction (의미 기반 발화 교육), moving beyond simple repetition, and strengthening the learner's self-efficacy (자기 효능감).

In conclusion, the teaching method for vowels and consonants is the foundation and core of Korean language education, and through a systematic and scientific approach, learner-centered pronunciation education can be realized.

¹⁵ Chang Jin-woo. Introduction to teaching Korean. - Seoul : Hakmunsa, 2017. – C. 76.

¹⁶ Ahn Mi-kyung. Teaching Korean Pronunciation to Foreign Students. - Daegu : Gyeongbuk University Press, 2021. – C. 155.

4. Conclusion

This thesis presented a direction for Korean pronunciation education by integrating phonological and pedagogical approaches to the teaching methods of vowels and consonants.

Learners' pronunciation errors can be improved not through simple correction but through integrated instruction encompassing cognition, articulation, and meaning (인지, 조음, 의미의 통합적 교수). Future education is expected to evolve into a learning environment that combines digital-based pronunciation textbooks with AI analysis.

Furthermore, a systematic analysis of pronunciation error patterns based on the learner's native language is essential. Based on this, a system for customized feedback and step-by-step pronunciation training is required. Pronunciation education should not be confined merely to phonetic accuracy but must be approached integratively with elements of speaking fluency, intonation, and prosody (말하기 유창성, 억양, 운율 요소).

Moreover, the development of teaching models that link linguistic evidence with the demands of actual educational settings (언어학적 근거와 실제 교육 현장의 요구가 연계된 교수 모델) must continue. Finally, as Korean pronunciation education develops into individualized learning combined with technology (기술과 결합한 개별화 학습), the role of the teacher will expand from a knowledge transmitter to a learning facilitator and coaching expert (학습 촉진자·코칭 전문가).

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