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Review Article

A Contrastive Study of Sounds between Chinese and Korean

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Abstract: Chinese and Korean are of two different language systems, though many words sound similar in pronunciation. Chinese learners find that it is not easy to acquire the Korean pronunciation as they have expected. The present paper will look into the differences in pronunciation between the two languages and locate the potential difficulties for Chinese.

Keywords: Pronunciation, Chinese, Korean.

INTRODUCTION

In the book "The Languages of Japan and Korea" edited by Nicolas Tranter, the researchers conducted a diachronic and synchronic study on Japanese and Korean [1].

Korean has 19 consonants, ten vowels, and two glides or semivowels /w/ and /y/. Syllables and other linguistic units as well as their boundaries play a significant role in Korean phonology. Many phonological alternations follow universal phenomena such as assimilation, but the following characteristics are crucial for understanding various Korean phonological alternations, including the various sandhi phenomena:

Sound symbolism is prevalent and systematic. Consonantal strength and vowel harmony play significant roles in sound symbolic words.

Syllable-final consonants are unreleased before another consonant and at major grammatical boundaries. The intervocalic position is conductive to consonantal weakening [1].

As for the foreign language learning, it is of great importance to grasp accurate pronunciation. For historical reasons, Japanese and Korean evolve under the great influence of Ancient Chinese. In the history, Koreans, like the Japanese, kept making new words based on Sino-Korean or Chinese character-based roots, and writing in mixed script was considered clearer and more formal. Modern Standard Korean is neither a tone language like Chinese, nor a pitch-accent language like Japanese, nor a stress language like English, but a syllable-timed language.

Though Chinese and Korean belong to two different language systems, it's true that there are still some in common between the two languages, mostly found in vocabulary. As for the pronunciation, the most possible difficulty lies in the sounds that are not in the learners' native language.

Both languages have the distinction between vowels and consonants. First Chinese is compared with Korean, aiming to locate the potential difficulty for Chinese Korean learners. Korean is a syllable-timed language, rich in its sound inventory, sound symbolism, and allophonic and morphophonemic alternations. Some sounds can be found in both languages but some don't.

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Table-1: Vowels and consonants only in Korean

	Korean	Н	1	エ	+	‡	ш	Ħ	#	ᅫ	웨	ᅬ	_	П	СС	丗	ᄍ	Ж
Γ	transcription	[3]	[e]	[ə]	[0]	[yə]	[yo]	[38]	[ye]	[we]	[we]	[we]	[i]	[k']	[t']	[p']	[tʃˈ]	[s']

In Table 1, the vowels and consonants only in Korean are shown together with the transcription. What's more, the coda sounds like \cite{G} , $\cite{$

Similar Pairs

Both 에 and 애 sound almost the same in the sound patterns like /ne/ (네) and /ne/ (내). Even though each of them may appear in different words, learners tend to confuse about which one. In a Korean class, the teacher asked us to write down /ɔlenzɪ/, the students were confused about which one was right, 올엔지, 오렌지, 올앤지 or 오랜지.

In a survey conducted among 10 international Korean beginners (5 Vietnamese, 3 Pakistanis, 2 Chinese), the subjects are required to fill in the blanks with Korean words after listening for 3 times. There are altogether 30 words containing 20 having the confusable and unfamiliar pairs which the author has great difficulty in distinguishing. The 10 learners are supposed to write down these words in Korean without any references (such as dictionaries, verbal hints, etc.) after listening to the Korean pronunciations for 3 times. Such dictation aims to test whether these confusable pairs also pose difficulty to other learners. The following table lists the 30 words with the 20 words in a broad style.

Table-2: 20 Korean words containing confusable pairs

Korean **내세, 게다가**, 일어나다, **옥내배선**, 오렌지, **조개, 머드러기**, 제미있다, **뒤대다, 좨기, 러거, 섀미**, 커피, **채고추, 데니어**, 회이, **은행, 부래지리**,테레비전, **너트, 터미넬, 조건부**, 제육관, **머구리**, 공체, 언제, **폐과시키**,배우다, **여행, 죄송**

The subjects tend to confuse with the pairs, no matter learned or to be learned. About 8 of them have made more mistakes as for the unfamiliar words, which contain the vowels like 네 or 네, 셰 or 쉐. As for the learned word 일어나다, 6 of the subjects wrote it as 이러나다. There are still 2 subjects confusing about the consonants 커 and 거.

Chinese Character-based Articulation

Owing to the history, Chinese characters derived from ancient literature are still abundant in Korean. Chinese characters (한자) in Korean generally derive from the six categories of Chinese character (육서). (강개충, [2]; 상기숙, 한운진 [5]) Some articulations of the characters remain the same or similar after hundreds of years' development. For example, men (门) in Chinese is 문 (門). Though many characters have distinctive onset in Korean, the nasal codas, especially the glottal nasal codas, usually remain the same or similar. By looking through the book of 강개충 [4], altogether 402 characters with alveolar nasal /n/ codas and 406 characters with glottal nasal /ŋ/ codas keep the same or similar articulation as Chinese, while 98 characters with alveolar nasal /n/ codas in Chinese have changed into bilabial nasal /m/ codas, 6 into glottal nasal /ŋ/ codas. Only one Chinese character, originally having glottal nasal /ŋ/ codas, has changed into alveolar nasal /n/ codas, heng (恒, 환). This invariable feature can facilitate the acquisition of articulation in Korean words.

Though some codas of these Chinese Characters remain the similar features as in the contemporary Chinese, there are still a greater number of characters taking up different codas and onsets. For example, shū-diàn (书店) is pronounced as 서점 in Korean, having different onsets and codas. But if we look closer at the variations, we may find some regular variation rules:

Chinese Korean Chinese Korean Chinese Korean

Onsets b, p, f 日 q, c, ch 六 j, g, q コ m ロ z, zh ス d ロ l 己 n L s. sh. x 人 t E x. h ゔ p 亚

For example, the two characters of zhèng-tŏng (正统, 정통) in Chinese begin with the onsets /zh/ and /t/, which are transferred into Korean onsets /ス/ and /ス/.

In some cases, the onsets vary greatly, such as qiú (囚,수), tíng(亭/停,정), chéng(乘,合), chéng (呈,정), etc. What's more, the coda variations tend to differ greatly. These irregularities pose potential difficulty for learners to acquire Korean.

Regular and Irregular Variations

Korean and Chinese also have distinct ways of the articulation. In Chinese, it is hard to find assimilation but in Korean assimilation is prevailing. Assimilation is also common in English. There are two ways of assimilation, anticipatory articulation and preservative articulation. Anticipatory articulation is by far the most common cause of assimilations in English. In this process, the gesture for one sound is affected by anticipating the gesture for the next sound. But there are also preservative assimilations, in which the gesture for one sound preserves into the gesture for the next sound. The pronunciation of the phrase *it is* [It Iz] as *it's* [Its] is a result of the perseveration of the voiceless of [t]. [2]

As for Korean articulation, what confused the Chinese learners most lies in variations. According to the book coauthored by 우인혜 and 라혜민 [2], the articulation rules of Korean can be divided into regular and irregular variations.

Table-3: The regular and irregular variations in Korean articulation

articulation assimilation	Numbers	Types	examples					
the regular variations 1		liaison	벗이요 is pronounced as [버시요], and 남아요 as [나마요]					
the irregular variations	5	Nasalization	앞문 is assimilated into[암문], 낱말 into [난말], 국물 into [궁물].					
		Compacted articulation	잡비 is assimilated into [잡삐], 법대 into [법때], 답자 into [답짜], 학생 into					
		articulation	[학쌩], 입국 into [입꾹]					
		aspirated articulation	입학 is assimilated into [이파], 갇형 into [마텽], 그렇지 into [그러치],					
		articulation	빨갛게 into [빨가케].					
		[ㄹ]-related	심리 is assimilated into [심니], 생산량 into [생산냥], 섭리 into [섬리].					
		articulation						
		glottal articulation	굳이 is assimilated into [구지], 같이 into [가치], 닫히다 into [다치다]					

Among the six ways of variations, liaison is the most common, but for the rest 5, the beginners have to bear the rules in mind after great effort, partly because of the irregularity of the articulation.

- 1) Liaison: When the former sound ending with a coda is followed by a sound beginning with a vowel onset, the coda tends to combine with the vowel onset and form a new sound pattern. Take 한국어 for example. It is pronounced as [han gu gɔ], though independently pronounced as [han] [guo] [ɔ]. [o] Stands for the compacted articulation of the coda 윽.
- 2) Nasalization: When the former sound ending with a coda like \boxminus/ \boxdot , \sqsubset/ \boxminus and \lnot/ \lnot is followed by a consonant onset like \sqsupset and \sqsubseteq , they will be assimilated respectively into nasals $[\lnot]$, $[\sqsubseteq]$ and $[\lnot]$.
- 4) aspirated articulation: When the coda \boxminus is followed by the onset \lnot , it will be assimilated into $[\boxdot]$; when the coda \sqsubset is followed by the onset \lnot or vice versa, it will be assimilated into $[\boxdot]$; when the coda \lnot is followed by the onset \lnot or vice versa, it will be assimilated into $[\lnot]$; when the coda \lnot is followed by the onset \lnot or vice versa, it will be assimilated into $[\lnot]$.
- 5) ㄹ-related articulation: Generally, when the coda except vowels, ㄴ and ㄹ is followed by the onset ㄹ, then the onset ㄹ will be assimilated into [ㄴ]. For example, 종려 is assimilated into [종녀], 염려 into [염녀], and 대통령 into [대통녕]. In

the case of [ㄴ] and [ㄹ], when they follow each other, both are pronounced as [ㄹ]. For example, 편리 is assimilated into [펼리], and 실내 into [실래]. There are exceptions, like the coda ㅂ and ㄱ followed by the onset ㄹ to be assimilated into [ㅁ+ㄴ] and [ㅇ+ㄴ], such as 섭리 as [섬리] and 국력 as [궁녁].

6) Glottal articulation: When the coda \Box is followed by the vowel onset O|, then it will be assimilated into $[\pi]$, the \Box followed by O| assimilated into $[\pi]$, and \Box and \Box followed by O| assimilated into $[\pi]$.

Numbers from 2 to 6 are variations resulting from assimilation. In most cases, the gesture of the former sound is affected by anticipating the gesture for the next sound, i.e. the anticipatory assimilation, which is also prevailing in Korean.

CONCLUSION

Korean and Chinese have much in common, mostly in vocabulary. But the distinctive features in articulation of the Korean language are significant for learners. The minimal pairs, Chinese character-related pronunciation as well as the regular and irregular variations pose potential difficulty for Chinese learners.

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