

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 conducive 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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For example, the two characters of zhèng-tǒng (正統, 정통) in Chinese begin with the onsets /zh/ and /t/, which are transferred into Korean onsets /ㅈ/ and /ㅌ/.

In some cases, the onsets vary greatly, such as qiú (囚, 수), tíng(亭/停, 정), chéng(乘, 승), 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* [ɪt ɪz] as *it's* [ɪts] 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 [버시오], 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 [학생], 입국 into [입꼭]
		aspirated articulation	입학 is assimilated into [이파], 갈형 into [마형], 그렇지 into [그러치], 빨갈게 into [빨가케].
		[ㄹ]-related articulation	심리 is assimilated into [심니], 생산량 into [생산냥], 섬리 into [섬리].
		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 go], though independently pronounced as [han] [gu_g] [o]. [g] Stands for the compacted articulation of the coda ㄱ.

2) Nasalization: When the former sound ending with a coda like ㅁ/ㅂ, ㄷ/ㅌ and ㄱ/ㅋ is followed by a consonant onset like ㅁ and ㄴ, they will be assimilated respectively into nasals [ㅁ], [ㄴ] and [ㅇ].

3) compacted articulation: When the former sound ending with a coda like ㅁ, ㄷ and ㄱ is followed by a consonant onset like ㅁ, ㄷ, ㄱ, ㅈ and ㅉ, they will be assimilated respectively into compacted sounds like [ㅁㅁ] [ㄷㄷ] [ㄱㄱ] [ㅈㅈ] and [ㅉㅉ].

4) aspirated articulation: When the coda ㅁ is followed by the onset ㅎ, it will be assimilated into [ㅁㅎ]; when the coda ㄷ is followed by the onset ㅎ or vice versa, it will be assimilated into [ㄷㅎ]; when the coda ㅈ is followed by the onset ㅎ or vice versa, it will be assimilated into [ㅈㅎ]; when the coda ㄱ is followed by the onset ㅎ or vice versa, it will be assimilated into [ㄱㅎ].

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 [대통령]. 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 [ㅂ+ㄹ] and [ㅇ+ㄹ], such as 섭리 as [섭리] and 국력 as [궁녁].

6) Glottal articulation: When the coda ㄷ is followed by the vowel onset ㅍ, then it will be assimilated into [ㅈ], the ㅌ followed by ㅍ assimilated into [ㅊ], and ㄷ and ㅎ followed by ㅍ assimilated into [ㅊ].

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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