

Andrea De Benedittis

# KOREAN LANGUAGE

## for Beginners

In collaboration with Giuseppina De Nicola  
and Lee Sang Suk



Seoul Selection 

# Contents



Author's Note	vi
How to Use This Book	viii
<b>Unit 1</b> 한글 1 Korean alphabet 1 Introduction   Vowels   Consonants 1	1
<b>Unit 2</b> 한글 2 Korean alphabet 2 Consonants 2   Some features of the Korean language	13
<b>Unit 3</b> 한글 3 Korean alphabet 3 Diphthongs   Phonetic rules   Intonation   Korean fonts	27
<b>Unit 4</b> 공부합니까? Do you study? The topic particle 은/는   The formal level of speech – 버니다/습니다   The nominal predicate in an affirmative sentence	45
<b>Unit 5</b> 이것은 무엇입니까? What is this? Demonstrative adjectives and pronouns   The particle 의   Lexicon: names of countries   Personal pronouns   Interrogative pronouns	53
<b>Unit 6</b> 저것은 자동차가 아닙니다. That's not a car. The subject particle 이/가   The nominal predicate in a negative sentence   Interrogative pronouns 무슨, 어느, 어떤	63
<b>Unit 7</b> 책은 책상 위에 있습니다. The book is on the desk. The particle 에   The verbs 있다 and 없다   The prepositions of place   More information on the verbs 있다 and 없다   Lexicon: feelings	71

<b>Unit 8</b>	<b>생일이 언제입니까? When is your birthday?</b>	81
	The particle 을/를   Cardinal numbers   The particles ~부터/~까지	
<b>Unit 9</b>	<b>잘 지내요? Are you well?</b>	95
	The particle 도   The semiformal level of speech 아/어/여요   The semiformal level of speech for verbs with stems ending in ㅂ   Lexicon: clothes	
<b>Unit 10</b>	<b>음악을 들어요. I listen to music.</b>	105
	The particles 에게 and 한테   The semiformal level of speech for verbs with stems ending in ㅈ   The semiformal level of speech for verbs with stems ending in ㅌ   The particle 하고   Lexicon: family	
<b>Unit 11</b>	<b>공부를 열심히 해요! I study hard!</b>	113
	The particle 에서   The semiformal level of speech for verbs with stems ending in ㅎ and the verb 하다   Lexicon: the colours   Adverbs   Verbs ending in 하다	
<b>Unit 12</b>	<b>교수님은 무엇을 하십니까? What does the professor do?</b>	123
	The semiformal level of speech for verbs with stems ending in ㅅ   The particle (으)로   The honorific form, first part	
<b>Unit 13</b>	<b>성함이 어떻게 되세요? What's your name?</b>	133
	The short negative form using 안 or 못   The honorific form, second part The particles 에게서 and 한테서   The exhortative form in the formal level of speech (으)십시오	
<b>Unit 14</b>	<b>어제 친구랑 영화를 봤어요. Yesterday I watched a movie with a friend.</b>	139
	The honorific form, third part   Imperative polite form -(으)십시오   Simple past tense -았/었/였-   The particle (이)랑	
<b>Appendix</b>	Verbs: summary of the conjugations When to use the particles 이/가 and 은/는 How to write an email How to address different people Solutions of the exercises Essential bibliography	147



## Author's Note

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*

# How to Use This Book

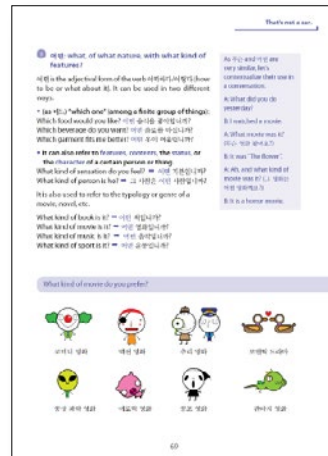
1. This book is divided into fourteen units. The first three deal with the Korean alphabet (vowels, consonants, and diphthongs), sounds, and phonology, and explain the main features of the language (verbs, linguistic protocol, particles, punctuation marks, and the lexicon).



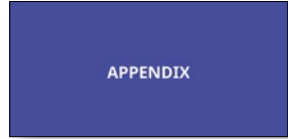
2. Some simple grammatical elements will be introduced from Unit 4. Each unit has a cover page featuring the main words used in that unit. Unlike many other Korean textbooks, this one begins with the formal level of speech. We have chosen to begin this way because verbs follow a more regular conjugation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



1'

listening track



expression to memorize



note\_ 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 (등장인물)



나  
me



곰인형  
teddy bear



세종대왕  
Great King Sejong



양반탈  
mask of a noble



친구  
friend



어머니  
mother



아버지  
father



선인장  
cactus



귀신  
ghost



부네탈  
mask of lady



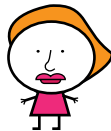
돌하르방  
stone grandpa



양반  
noble



남자친구  
boyfriend



여자친구  
girlfriend



신부  
bride



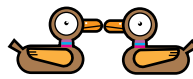
신랑  
groom



눈사람  
snowman



고릴라  
gorilla



원앙  
mandarin duck  
or lovebird



광대  
clown



# Unit 1

## 한글 1

### Korean alphabet 1

Introduction

Vowels

Consonants 1



1

#### Sounds and Vocabulary

ㅏ [a]	ㅑ [yo]	ㅓ [m]	네 yes	언니 elder sister
ㅓ [eo]	ㅠ [yu]	ㅗ [s]	마음 heart	엄마 mom
ㅗ [o]	ㅟ [ae]	ㅇ [ng]	매미 cicada	오이 cucumber
ㅜ [u]	ㅞ [e]	가구 furniture	몸 body	이 tooth
ㅡ [eu]	ㅟ [yae]	가시 thorn	사슴 deer	이마 forehead
ㅣ [i]	ㅟ [ye]	개 dog	소 cow	
ㅑ [ya]	ㅑ [g]	거미 spider	아이 baby	
ㅋ [yeo]	ㄴ [n]	게 crab	악어 crocodile	

## 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 phono-characterized.

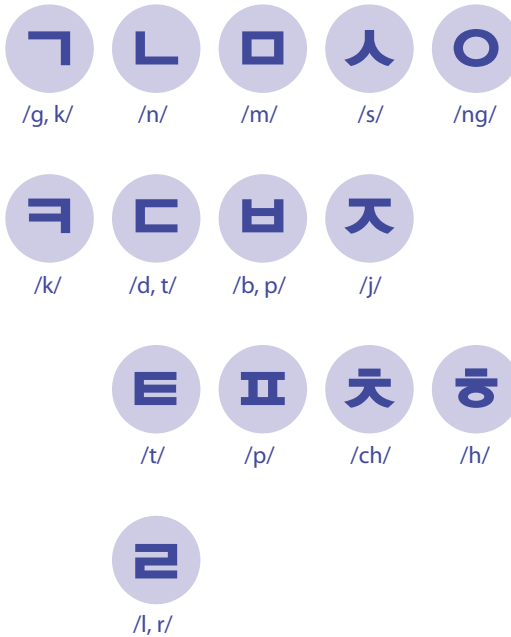
Initially, the alphabet had twenty-eight main letters, which over time have been reduced to twenty-four. Eight are considered basic sounds, and from these derive all the other consonants and vowels. We must first distinguish between:

- 1 the five basic consonants [ㄱ, ㄴ, ㄷ, ㄹ, ㅁ] from which derive the **fourteen** simple consonants,
- 2 three basic vowels [ ㅏ, ㅑ, ㅓ ] from which derive the first ten, simple, or iotized, vowels.

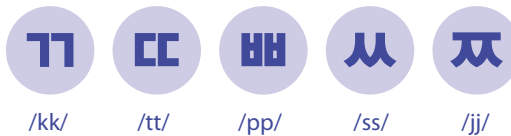
From the **fourteen simple consonants** (ㄱ, ㄴ, ㄷ, ㄹ, ㅁ, ㅂ, ㅅ, ㅇ, ㅈ, ㅊ, ㅋ, ㆁ) are derived in turn **five double consonants** (ㄲ, ㄷ, ㅃ, ㅆ, ㅈ) and **eleven complex**

combinations (ㄱ, ㅋ, ㆁ, ㄷ, ㅌ, ㄹ, ㄴ, ㄷ, ㅌ, ㄹ, ㄴ, ㅁ, ㅂ, ㅅ, ㅆ, ㅈ, ㅊ, ㅊ, ㅊ, ㅊ). The ten simple vowels (ㅏ, ㅑ, ㅓ, ㅕ, ㅗ, ㅛ, ㅜ, ㅠ, ㅡ, ㅣ) are followed by four complex vowels (ㅘ, ㅙ, ㅚ, ㅛ) and seven diphthongs (ㅝ, ㅞ, ㅟ, ㅠ, ㅡ, ㅢ, ㅣ).

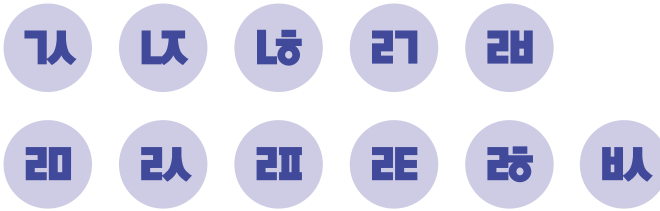
1 fourteen simple consonants



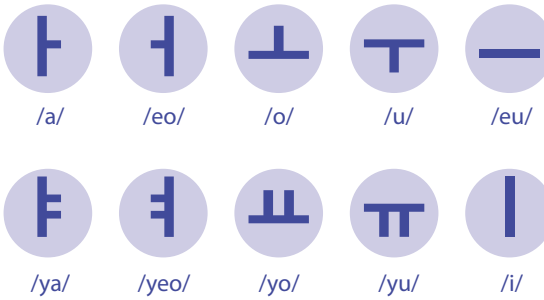
2 five double consonants



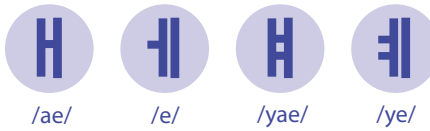
3 eleven complex combinations



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:

**받침**

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.

**How to write Korean syllables**

**Example 1**

(C1 unvoiced + ) V



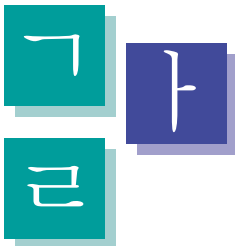
**Example 2**

C1 + V



**Example 3**

C1 + V + C2



**Example 4**

C1 + V + C2 + C3



## Vowels

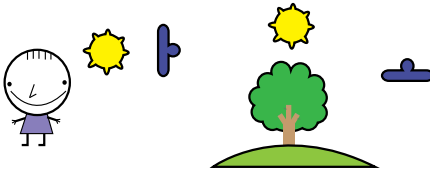
The graphemes of Korean vowels are inspired by **three core elements** of Korean cosmology (heaven, man, earth), to which are respectively associated three graphic elements: a mark, a vertical line and a horizontal line.



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 vowels ㅏ and ㅑ. The earth combined with the sun (heaven) brings the graphic formation of the vowels ㅓ and ㅕ.

If a vowel depicts a man standing in front of a rising sun (ㅏ), or a sun rising on the earth (ㅓ) 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 (ㅑ) or a sun under the earth (ㅕ), this implies a negative nuance, and the vowel is considered negative or lunar.



\* Even if the vowels ㅏ and ㅓ are considered neutral, they behave as lunar vowels. So do the complex vowels ㅗ, ㅛ, ㅜ, ㅠ and ㅡ as these include the ㅑ vowel.

## Examples

### Negative nuance

- 덥다 [deopta]: to be hot  
 더럽다 [deoreopta]: to be dirty  
 뚱뚱하다 [ttungttunghada]: to be fat

### Positive nuance

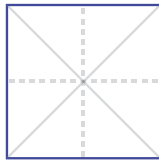
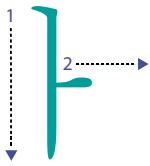
- 따뜻하다 [ttatteutada]: to be warm  
 다럽다 [darapta]: to be lightly dirty  
 통통하다 [tongtonghada]: to be plump

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.

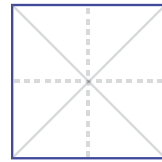
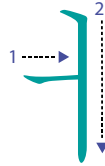


Let's write!

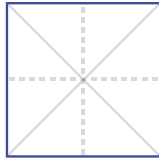
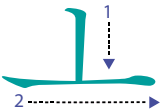
[a]



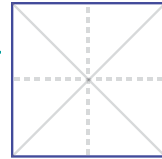
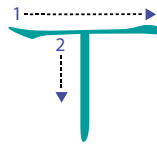
[eo]



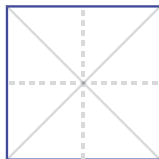
[o]



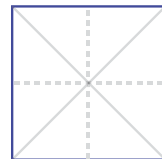
[u]



[eu]



[i]



\* When practicing the pronunciation of these vowels, pay attention to the next two points:

- 1 ㅣ is a broad "o". Open your mouth wide and then pronounce the sound. When pronouncing ㅑ, you half-close your mouth, like in the drawing.



- 2 The ㅑ vowel corresponds the long "oo" sound found in "moon" and "too." On the contrary, ㅓ 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

널다 [neolda]: to hang

곰 [gom]: bear

코피 [kopi]: nosebleed

놀다 [nolda]: to play, to idle away



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),  
으 (eu), 이 (i)

#### Examples

오이 cucumber

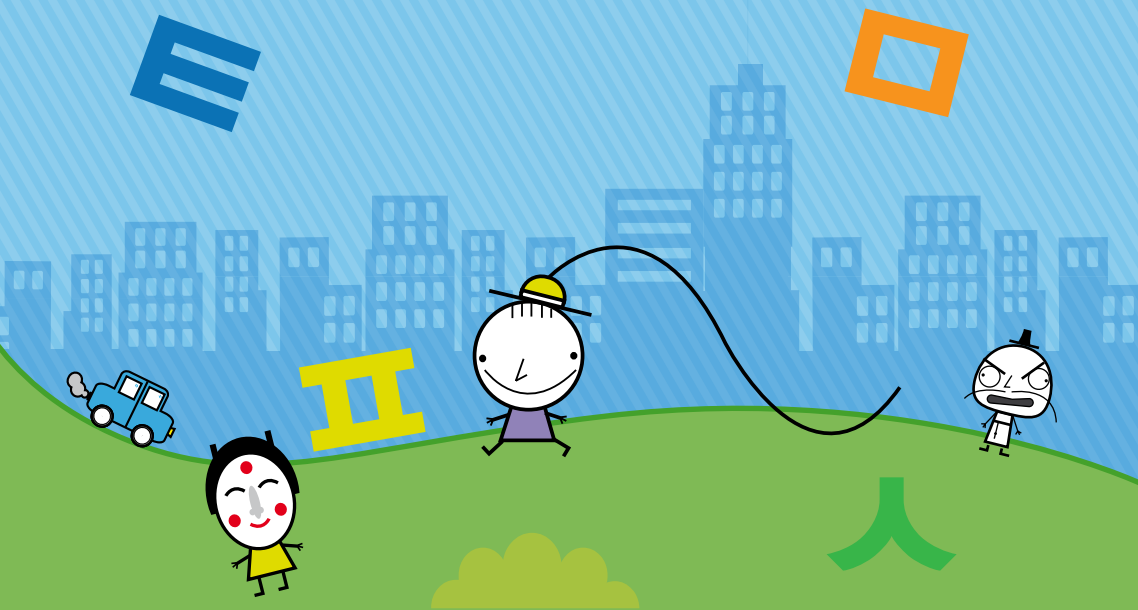
아이 baby

이 tooth





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ISBN 978-1-62412-068-8