

Pronunciation of Polish students learning Korean

폴란드 학생들의 한국어 발음에서의 문제점

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This paper aims to start an analysis of the pronunciation patterns of Polish students studying Korean, their most common mistakes, the level of intelligibility of the sounds produced and the influence of the mother tongue (i.e. Polish) on their Korean pronunciation.

The important question is the aim of learning a foreign language. Some students want to speak the language the same way the native speakers do, for others intelligibility¹ is the most important factor. I would like to emphasize that being understood by the native Korean speakers is the most important, being understood by the other students of the same linguistic background (mother tongue) is of lesser importance.

The students who consider the latter factor – intelligibility - more important might sound „strange”, „unnatural” but they are able to deliver their message. In this paper I will consider intelligibility as the most important criterion in the production of Polish students studying Korean.

The students whose pronunciation is discussed here are the students of Korean Section of Warsaw University who started learning Korean after entering Korean Studies Section and students of Warsaw University who attend Korean Language Course. Their level of Korean proficiency can be called „beginners” or „intermediate”. I will discuss their pronunciation and perception in two parts: vowels and consonants.

1. Vowels

According to the survey conducted among the students, the most difficult vowels are Korean [오] and [우]. It is hard for the students to perceive the difference between these two vowels, which is consistent with the findings of Lee (1998) that native Korean speakers do not distinguish [우] and [오] in pronunciation. The students pronounce Polish [u] (intelligible) or [o] instead of Korean [오/우]. Pronunciation of Polish [o] instead of Korean [오/우] is understood as Korean [어] by Korean listeners so the condition of intelligibility is not fulfilled – the listeners perceived a different sound

¹ In this paper „intelligibility” describes a situation when listener perceives certain sound as a sound intended by the speaker.

than that intended by the speaker.

The students themselves do not consider Korean [으] a difficult vowel. They simply replace Korean [으] with Polish [u]. According to Paradowska (2002) Korean [으] and Polish [u] are not even similar and pronouncing Polish [u] instead of Korean [으] might result in misunderstandings because Koreans perceive Polish [u] as Korean [우]. Students have no problems with perception – most students perceive Korean [으] as [으], there are very few cases when it is confused with [우]. It is very interesting that the students have no problems with recognizing Korean [으] produced by fellow students. Since most of them replace Korean [으] with Polish [u], it is easily perceived by the speakers of the same mother tongue as Korean [으].

The table presents the pronunciation patterns of Polish students learning Korean. The first column presents Korean phonemes, the second column – Polish phonemes that are pronounced instead of Korean phonemes presented in the first column, the third column presents the degree of similarity between the two phonemes in question (the comparison is based on formant frequencies Paradowska (2002)), the fourth column presents the level of intelligibility. Korean [오] and Polish [i] are identical (they are produced in the same place of articulation) therefore pronouncing Polish [i] instead of Korean [오] does not provoke any communication problems and is considered „intelligible”. It is the same in case of Korean [우] and Polish [a].

Korean	Polish	Degree of similarity ²	Level of intelligibility
[오]	[i]	identical	intelligible
[애]	[e]	different	intelligibile
	[ɛ]	similar	Perceived as Korean [오]
[애]	[e]	different	intelligibile
	[ɛ]	different	intelligibile
[우]	[a]	identical	intelligibile
[우]	[o]	identical	intelligibile
[오]	[u]	identical	intelligibile
	[o]	different	Perceived as Korean [우]
[우]	[u]	similar	intelligibile
	[o]	different	Perceived as Korean [우]
[으]	[ɛ]	different	Perceived as Korean [오]
	[u]	different	Perceived as Korean [우]
	[i]	similar	Perceived as Korean [오]

Vowels

² According to the shape of lips, horizontal and vertical tongue position while producing a vowel, I define three „Degrees of similarity”: identical (all three conditions are identical), similar (at least one of the three conditions), different (none of the three).

This analysis proves that, although the students do not consider [으] a difficult sound, it is the most difficult one and it poses many problems. It proves that the phonemes that are absent in the mother tongue are not only most difficult to master (theory of Flege) but also might cause the most „intelligibility” problems.

List of most common mistakes made by Polish students:

마음 pronounced by Polish students is often perceived as 마임 by native Korean speakers

다음	다임
곰	검
무슨	모순
끄다	끼다
봄	범
고기	거기
꿈	껌

2. Consonants

It seems that consonants pose a much bigger problem for Polish students learning Korean. In Polish the main opposition in stops is voicing so, naturally, the students try to apply the same rule to Korean. In Korean the opposition is strong/weak/aspirated and voicing is not as important as in Polish. For many students differentiating consonants into three categories seems to be the most difficult. After many exercises their perception of Korean consonants seems to improve a lot but the problems with pronunciation seem to continue.

The table presents Korean and Polish consonants. The first column shows Korean consonants, the second – Polish, the third – the degree of similarity, the fourth presents what the native Korean listener perceives if the consonant in question is simply produced as a Polish consonants listed in the second column.

Korean	Polish	Degree of similarity ³	Level of intelligibility
[ㄹ]	[m]	identical	intelligible
[ㄴ]	[n]	identical	intelligible
[ㅇ]	[ng]	similar	Perceived as [ㅇ ㄱ]
[ㄷ]	[r]	identical	intelligible

³ Classification of consonants is more difficult than vowels. The most important criterion is VOT. (comparison of Korean and Polish stops is being researched by the author and the results will be published soon).

	[l]	identical	intelligible
[ㅂ]	[p]	similar	Perceived as [ㅂ, ㅍ, ㅃ]
	[b]	similar	
[ㅍ]	[ph]	similar	intelligible
[ㅃ]	[p]	similar	Perceived as [ㅂ, ㅍ, ㅃ]
	[b]	similar	
[ㄷ]	[t]	similar	Perceived as [ㄷ, ㅌ, ㄸ]
	[d]	similar	
[ㅌ]	[th]	similar	intelligible
[ㄸ]	[t]	similar	Perceived as [ㄷ, ㅌ, ㄸ]
	[d]	similar	
[ㄱ]	[k]	similar	Perceived as [ㄱ, ㅋ, ㆁ]
	[g]	similar	
[ㅋ]	[kh]	similar	intelligible
[ㆁ]	[k]	similar	Perceived as [ㄱ, ㅋ, ㆁ]
	[g]	similar	
[ㅅ]	[s]	similar	Perceived as [ㅅ, ㅆ]
[ㅆ]	[s]	similar	
[ㅈ]	[dz]	similar	Perceived as [ㅈ, ㅊ, ㅉ]
	[c]	similar	
	[dʒ]	similar	
	[č]	similar	
	[dʒ]	similar	
	[cz]	similar	
[ㅊ]	[dz]	similar	Perceived as [ㅈ, ㅊ, ㅉ]
	[c]	similar	
	[dʒ]	similar	
	[č]	similar	
	[dʒ]	similar	
	[cz]	similar	
[ㅉ]	[dz]	similar	Perceived as [ㅈ, ㅊ, ㅉ]
	[c]	similar	
	[dʒ]	similar	
	[č]	similar	
	[dʒ]	similar	
	[cz]	similar	
[ㅎ]	[h]	similar	intelligible

Consonants

The survey conducted among the students and the table above prove that Korean [ㅂ, ㄷ, ㅎ, ㄱ] are not difficult to pronounce and perceive because they can be simply replaced by Polish consonants.

Korean stops, affricates and fricatives are more difficult. There are no single equivalents in Polish so the students try to produce sounds that are similar.

According to the survey conducted among the students, aspirated consonants are relatively easier to pronounce than weak and strong. The reason for this is that the students pronounce them as very strongly aspirated (Polish [ph, kh, th]) which sounds very unnatural to Korean native speakers but

is intelligible. If the students pronounce Korean aspirated consonants in a single syllable, Korean listeners have no problems with perceiving them as aspirated. The problems arise when there are aspirated and weak consonants in neighbouring syllables. In this situation Korean listeners are confused because Polish unvoiced stops ([p, t, k]) have similar degree of aspiration as Korean aspirated stops ([ㅍ, ㅌ, ㅋ]).

If Polish students make a difference between Korean strong and weak consonants then Korean strong consonants are pronounced with a higher pitch of a following vowel. Since pitch of a following vowel is one of the distinguishing factors of Korean strong consonants, it is noticeable that the students try to implement this way of distinguishing Korean consonants.

The other problem of Polish students is pronunciation of Korean word final consonants. Korean word final stops are non-released ([ㅁ] ㅁ화) which means they do not have the final release stage. Such pronunciation does not occur in Polish, Polish word final stops are fully released. Students who do not attempt to apply „non-release stage” fail to pronounce a final consonant – a Korean listener hears a vowel [으] at the end of a word.

Korean [ㅇ] is difficult to Polish learners in an intervocalic position, before a consonant Polish students can produce it properly. In Polish there is a sound similar to Korean [ㅇ], it appears before [g], f. ex. „tango” [tango] but it never appears before vowels. Therefore Polish students produce sounds [ng] (or [ŋg]) instead of [ㅇ] and it might cause problems in communication. Polish students who major in Japanese Studies show a tendency to replace Korean [ㅇ] with Japanese [ŋ]. This is an interesting phenomena that does not apply to students who do not study Japanese.

The students consider Korean [ㅈ, ㅊ, ㅉ] the most difficult Korean consonants. They have problems with distinguishing them in perception and in production, they are not confused with other consonants but almost each student pronounces them in a different way what might be caused by a great number of Polish consonants corresponding to Korean [ㅈ, ㅊ, ㅉ].

The table presents the pronunciation intended by a Polish student and sounds perceived by a Korean listener.

Sounds intended	Sounds perceived
감	캠
캠	캠
팀	팀
딤	딤
각	카끄
성훈	성군
밥	파쁘
중앙	중강
강에	강게

3. Conclusion

In this paper I wanted to present the most common mistakes made by Polish students learning Korean, describe some reasons for their mistakes and show the role of mother tongue. Also I wanted to emphasize „intelligibility” as the main aim of learning a foreign language. I believe that materials presented here will be of some help to the teachers and students of Korean Language.

Lee (1998) 이재강 “한국어와 일본어의 모음에 관한 실험음성학적 대조 분석”, 박사 논문,
서울대학교 대학원

Paradowska (2002) „폴란드인의 한국어 모음의 발음과 청취에 대한 실험음성학적 연구”, 박사
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