Korean

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0. Basics

0.1 Korean Alphabet (한글)

0.1.1 Introduction

Hangul (한글) is the writing system used for the Korean language. Similarly to Latin, it is a **phonetic alphabet** unlike Chinese or Japanese, which are logographic scripts.

0.1.2 Basic Structure

Each character represents a **syllable** or **syllabic block**, and each syllable is composed of individual letters called **jamo (자므)**, which represent consonants or **jaeum (자음)** and vowels or **moeum (모음)**, read from left to right and top to bottom.

There are a total of 14 basic consonants and 10 monophthong vowels, following 5 double consonants and 11 additional vowels formed by combining two monophthongs in the same syllable (diphthongs).

Each syllable typically consists of:

- An initial consonant (**Choseong 초성**)

- A medial vowel (**Jungseong 중성**)

- An optional final consonant (**Jongseong 종성**)

Something to note is that the vowels ㅏ, ㅓ, ㅑ, ㅕ, ㅐ, ㅔ, ㅖ and ㅒ are written to the **right** of the initial consonant, while the rest are written to the **bottom**.

Throughout this text, in order to facilitate the learning process, all Hangul writing will be written with the following format:

<div align="center">

annyeonghaseyo
안녕하세요

</div>

Or, in case there is the need for translation:

<div align="center">

annyeonghaseyo
안녕하세요
hello

</div>

Here's a table for the possible initial, medial and final letters:

Initials 초성

한글	Latin	IPA	Key
ㄱ	g	/k/	D
ㄲ	kk	/k͈/	⇧D
ㄴ	n	/n/	S
ㄷ	d	/t/	E
ㄸ	tt	/t͈/	⇧E
ㄹ	r	/ɾ/	F
ㅁ	m	/m/	A
ㅂ	b	/p/	Q
ㅃ	pp	/p͈/	⇧Q
ㅅ	s	/s/	T
ㅆ	ss	/s͈/	⇧T
ㅇ			X
ㅈ	j	/tɕ/	W
ㅉ	jj	/tɕ͈/	⇧W
ㅊ	ch	/tɕʰ/	C
ㅋ	k	/kʰ/	Z
ㅌ	t	/tʰ/	X
ㅍ	p	/pʰ/	V
ㅎ	h	/h/	G

Medials 중성

한글	Latin	IPA	Key
ㅏ	a	/a/	K
ㅐ	ae	/ɛ/	O
ㅑ	ya	/ja/	I
ㅒ	yae	/jɛ/	⇧O
ㅓ	eo	/ʌ/	J
ㅔ	e	/e/	P
ㅕ	yeo	/jʌ/	U
ㅖ	ye	/je/	⇧P
ㅗ	o	/o/	H
ㅘ	wa	/wa/	
ㅙ	wae	/wɛ/	
ㅚ	oe	/ø/	
ㅛ	yo	/jo/	Y
ㅜ	u	/u/	N
ㅝ	wo	/wo/	
ㅞ	we	/wɛ/	
ㅟ	wi	/wi/	
ㅠ	yu	/ju/	B
ㅡ	eu	/ɯ/	M
ㅢ	ui	/ɯi/	
ㅣ	i	/i/	L

Finals 종성 (Optional)

Normal Finals

한글	Latin	IPA
ㄱ	g	/k̚/
ㄴ	n	/n/
ㄷ	d	/t̚/
ㄹ	l	/l/
ㅁ	m	/m/
ㅂ	b	/p̚/
ㅅ	s	/t̚/
ㅇ	ng	/ŋ/
ㅈ	j	/t̚/
ㅊ	ch	/t̚/
ㅋ	k	/k̚/
ㅌ	t	/t̚/
ㅍ	p	/p̚/
ㅎ	h	/t̚/

Double/Complex Finals

한글	Latin	IPA
ㄲ	kk	/k̚/
ㄳ	gs	/k̚/
ㄵ	nj	/n/
ㄶ	nh	/n/
ㄺ	lg	/k̚/
ㄻ	lm	/m/
ㄼ	lb	/p̚/
ㄽ	ls	/t̚/
ㄾ	lt	/t̚/
ㄿ	lp	/p̚/
ㅄ	bs	/p̚/
ㅆ	ss	/t̚/

0.1.3 Vowels

Vowels have distinct properties that should be taken into account before trying to do anything in Korean.

Bright, Dark and Neutral Vowels

Hangul vowels follow a certain harmony which is applied when forming them

Bright Vowels   양성모음   : ㅏ, ㅗ and ·[1]

Dark Vowels   음성모음   : ㅓ, ㅜ and ㅡ[2]

Neutral Vowels   중성모음   : ㅣ

This is really useful for when trying to study etymologies or sound symbolism, since words were often associated what type of vowel do they use[3].

Here we can see how compound monophthongs are formed:

ㅐ = ㅏ + ㅣ (Bright)   ㅒ = ㅣ + ㅐ (Bright)

ㅔ = ㅓ + ㅣ (Dark)   ㅖ = ㅣ + ㅔ (Dark)

Then, based on these "basic vowels", we have the rest of the diphthongs as a combination of bright+bright or dark+dark:

ㅛ = ㅣ + ㅗ (Bright)   ㅘ = ㅗ + ㅏ (Bright)   ㅞ = ㅜ + ㅔ (Dark)

ㅕ = ㅣ + ㅓ (Dark)   ㅙ = ㅗ + ㅐ (Bright)

ㅑ = ㅣ + ㅏ (Bright)   ㅚ = ㅗ + ㅣ (Bright)   ㅟ = ㅜ + ㅣ (Dark)

ㅠ = ㅣ + ㅜ (Dark)   ㅝ = ㅜ + ㅓ (Dark)   ㅢ = ㅡ + ㅣ (Dark)

There are also certain vowels that are considered extinct or obsolete, but you may see them in older texts

ㆎ = · + ㅣ (Bright)   ㆀ = ㅛ + ㅣ (Bright)   ㆌ = ㅠ + ㅣ (Dark)

This text will use this concept when talking about grammatical rules, although it is mostly an interesting fact about how Korean phonology is formed, it is absolutely optional to learn about this and I don't think Korean schools even teach about this concept.

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[1] · is an extinct character called 아래아

[2] ㅡ is considered both partially dark and partially neutral

[3] Fun fact: 남자 uses bright vowels and 여자 uses dark vowels

0.2   Basic Sentence Structure and Particles

Unlike English, which follows an $Subject - Verb - Object$ order, Korean follows $Subject - Object - Verb$ ordering.

Also, Korean relies heavily on particles to show each word's grammatical role, here are some examples[4] with literal translation

Role	Particle	Example			Meaning
Subject	이 / 가	jega 제**가** **I**	sagwa**reul** 사과를 apple	meogeoyo 먹어요 eat	**I** eat an **apple**
Topic	은 / 는	jeneun 저**는** **I**	sagwa**reul** 사과를 apple	meogeoyo 먹어요 eat	**As for me, I** eat an **apple**
Object	을 / 를	jega 제**가** **I**	sagwa**reul** 사과를 apple	meogeoyo 먹어요 eat	**I** eat an **apple**
Possession	의	jega 제**가** **I** / sinui 신**의** God's	sagwa**reul** 사과를 apple	meogeoyo 먹어요 eat	**I** eat God**'s apple**
Location	에서	jega 제**가** **I** / jeongwon**eseo** 정원**에서** at the garden	sagwa**reul** 사과를 apple	meogeoyo 먹어요 eat	**I** eat an **apple at** the garden

In informal speech, these particles are often dropped if the context is clear. Also note that there are much more particles than the ones in this table, however, they will be explained in their respective sections.

0.3   Pronouns

In Korean, pronouns (and most things) are divided between **informal** and **polite or formal** context:

Person	Number	Informal	Formal
1st	Singular	na 나	jeo 저
2nd	Singular	neo 너	dangsin 당신
3rd	Singular (M)	geu 그	geubun 그분
	Singular (F)	geunyeo 그녀	geubun 그분
1st	Plural	uri 우리	jeohui 저희
2nd	Plural	neohui 너희	yeoreobun 여러분
3rd	Plural	geudeul 그들	geubundeul 그분들

Note that in Korean subject pronouns are the same as object pronouns (He and Him)

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[4]With the particles: use left if ends in a consonant, right if it ends in a vowel

0.4 Numbering

Korean has two distinct numbering systems: **Native and Sino**[5]. Each is used in different contexts:

Sino vs Native		
	Sino	**Native**
Range	0–∞	1–99
Formality	More formal	More casual
Use	Abstract, precise things	Familiar, natural things
Counting	✗	✓
Hour	✗	✓
Minutes / Seconds	✓	✗
Dates	✓	✗
Phone numbers	✓	✗
Money	✓	✗
Floor numbers	✓	✗
Math / Units	✓	✗

0.4.1 Sino

Similarly to English, Sino-Korean combines the numbers 1 to 9 to form greater magnitudes. Here is the list of numbers from 0 to 9:

0. 영 (yeong)   2. 이 (i)   4. 사 (sa)   6. 육 (yuk)   8. 팔 (pal)

1. 일 (il)   3. 삼 (sam)   5. 오 (o)   7. 칠 (chil)   9. 구 (gu)

If we want to add a digit, it is almost exactly like English. For example, if we want to say 94, we say ninety-four *(nine-ten-four)*. In Korean, we say 구십사 (gusipsa / 9-10-4). This is the list of some magnitudes:

10. 십 (sip)   1000. 천 (cheon)   100000. 십만 (sipman)   10000000. 천만 (cheonman)

100. 백 (baek)   10000. 만 (man)   1000000. 백만 (baekman)   100000000. 억 (eok)

Note that unlike English, in which we divide every 3 zeroes (100,000 is a hundred **thousand** ($100 * 10^3$)), in Korean we divide every 4 zeroes (100,000 is 삽만 ($10 * 10^4$)).

Also it is worth noting that these numbers should be written like we do in English, using the **Arabic numeric** symbols. This helps when understanding the difference between Sino and Native: If we would intuitively write them using numbers *(12, 5)*, then we use Sino, if we would write them how they are spelled *(twelve, five)* we use Native.

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[5]Sino refers to Korean words of Chinese origin

0.4.2   Native

Fortunately, the Native numbering system only goes from 1 to 99, and then it starts counting exactly like Sino.

1. 하나 [hana]   3. 셋 [set]   5. 다섯 [daseot]   7. 일곱 [ilgop]   9. 아홉 [ahop]

2. 둘 [dul]   4. 넷 [net]   6. 여섯 [yeoseot]   8. 여덟 [yeodeol]

However, instead of counting magnitudes like in English, since it has such a limited range, it has specific words for 20, 30, 40, and so on

10. 열 [yeol]   30. 서른 [seoreun]   50. 쉰 [swin]   70. 일흔 [ilheun]   90. 아흔 [aheun]

20. 스물 [seumul]   40. 마흔 [maheun]   60. 예순 [yesun]   80. 여든 [yeodeun]

1. Verbs

1.1 Speech Levels

All verbs conjugations in the Korean language have distinct paradigms depending on the level of formality *(informal vs formal)* and politeness *(low vs high)* towards the listener, which are the following:

Higher Levels

하소서체 [1][2] Very formally polite, used to address royalty or in religious texts.

하십시오체 Formally polite, used to address colleagues in formal settings or between strangers at the start of a conversation.

Middle levels

해요체 Casually polite, used between strangers and colleagues.

하오체 Formally neutral, used in signs or among civil servants and the older generation.

하게체 Neutral, used for those under one's authority.

Lower levels

해라체 Formally impolite, used with close friends or relatives and by adults to children.

해체 Casually impolite or intimate, Between close friends and relatives.

However, there are a lot of levels that are either archaic or contextually limited, so this text will be focusing only on: 해체 , 해라체 , 해요체 , 하십시오체 and will be called *informal low*, *formal low*, *informal high* and *formal high* respectively for convenience. This will only be for verb conjugations since the four levels previously mentioned cover 99% of real-life usage.

Also it is worth warning that this text will try to use the least amount of verbs possible. It is recommended to use a dictionary, texts or conversations in order to expand one's vocabulary. This text should be used in order to learn how to structure said vocabulary.

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[1]**Etymology** 체 Comes from the word *style*, *form* or *body* in Sino-Korean.

[2]**Etymology** 하 Comes from the non-honorific imperative form of the verb *to do* 하다

1.2   Endings

1.2.1   Grammatical Mood Endings

Depending on the grammatical mood 형 (hyeong / form) of the sentence, each level has a specific ending. The four most important grammatical moods and the ones explained in further detail are *indicative, interrogative, imperative and propositive.*

Imperative 명령형

Level	Ending	Rule (ends with)	Examples (present)
IL	–아라 –어라	bright vowel → –아라 otherwise → –어라	가다 (gada) → 가라 (gala) 먹다 (meogda) → 먹어라 (meogeola)
IH	–세요 –으세요	bright vowel → –세요 otherwise → –으세요	가다 (gada) → 가세요 (gaseyo) 먹다 (meogda) → 먹으세요 (meogeuseyo)
FL[a]	–아라 –어라	vowel → –아라 consonant → –어라	가다 (gada) → 가라 (gala) 먹다 (meogda) → 먹어라 (meogeola)
FH	–십시오 –으십시오	vowel → –십시오 consonant → –으십시오	가다 (gada) → 가십시오 (gasibsio) 먹다 (meogda) → 먹으십시오 (meogeosibsio)

[a]Note that, in this grammatical mood, it sounds exactly the same as in *informal low*

Interrogative 의문형

Level	Ending	Rule (ends with)	Examples (present)
IL	–니? –어?	bright vowel → –니? otherwise → –어?	가다 (gada) → 가니? (gani?) 먹다 (meogda) → 먹어? (meogeo?)
IH	–아요? –어요?	bright vowel → –아요? otherwise → –어요?	가다 (gada) → 가요? (gayo?) 먹다 (meogda) → 먹어요? (meogeoyo?)
FL	–느냐? –냐?	vowel → –느냐? consonant → –냐?	가다 (gada) → 가냐? (ganya?) 먹다 (meogda) → 먹느냐? (meogneunya)
FH	–ㅂ니까? –습니까?	vowel → –ㅂ니까? consonant → –습니까?	가다 (gada) → 갑니까? (gabnikka) 먹다 (meogda) → 먹습니까? (meogseubnikka?)

Imperative 명령형			
Level	**Ending**	**Rule** (ends with)	**Examples** (present)
IL	–아라 –어라	bright vowel → –아라 otherwise → –어라	**가다** → 가라 *(gada → gala)* **먹다** → 먹어라 *(meogda → meogeola)*
IH	–세요 –으세요	bright vowel → –세요 otherwise → –으세요	**가다** → 가세요 *(gada → gaseyo)* **먹다** → 먹으세요 *(meogda → meogeuseyo)*
FL[a]	–아라 –어라	vowel → –아라 consonant → –어라	**가다** → 가라 *(gada → gala)* **먹다** → 먹어라 *(meogda → meogeola)*
FH	–십시오 –으십시오	vowel → –십시오 consonant → –으십시오	**가다** → 가십시오 *(gada → gasibsio)* **먹다** → 먹으십시오 *(meogda → meogeosibsio)*

[a]Note that, in this grammatical mood, it sounds exactly the same as in *informal low*

Propositive 청유형			
Level	**Ending**	**Rule** (ends with)	**Examples** (present)
IL	–자		**가다** → 가자 *(gada → gaja)* **먹다** → 먹자 *(meogda → meogja)*
IH	–아요 –어요	bright vowel → –아요 otherwise → –어요	**가다** → 가요 *(gada → gayo)* **먹다** → 먹어요 *(meogda → meogeoyo)*
FL	–게		**가다** → 가게 *(gada → gage)* **먹다** → 먹게 *(meogda → meogge)*
FH	–ㅂ시다 –읍시다	vowel → –ㅂ시다 consonant → –읍시다	**가다** → 갑시다 *(gada → gabnida)* **먹다** → 먹읍시다 *(meogda → meogeubnida)*

1.3 Grammatical Tenses