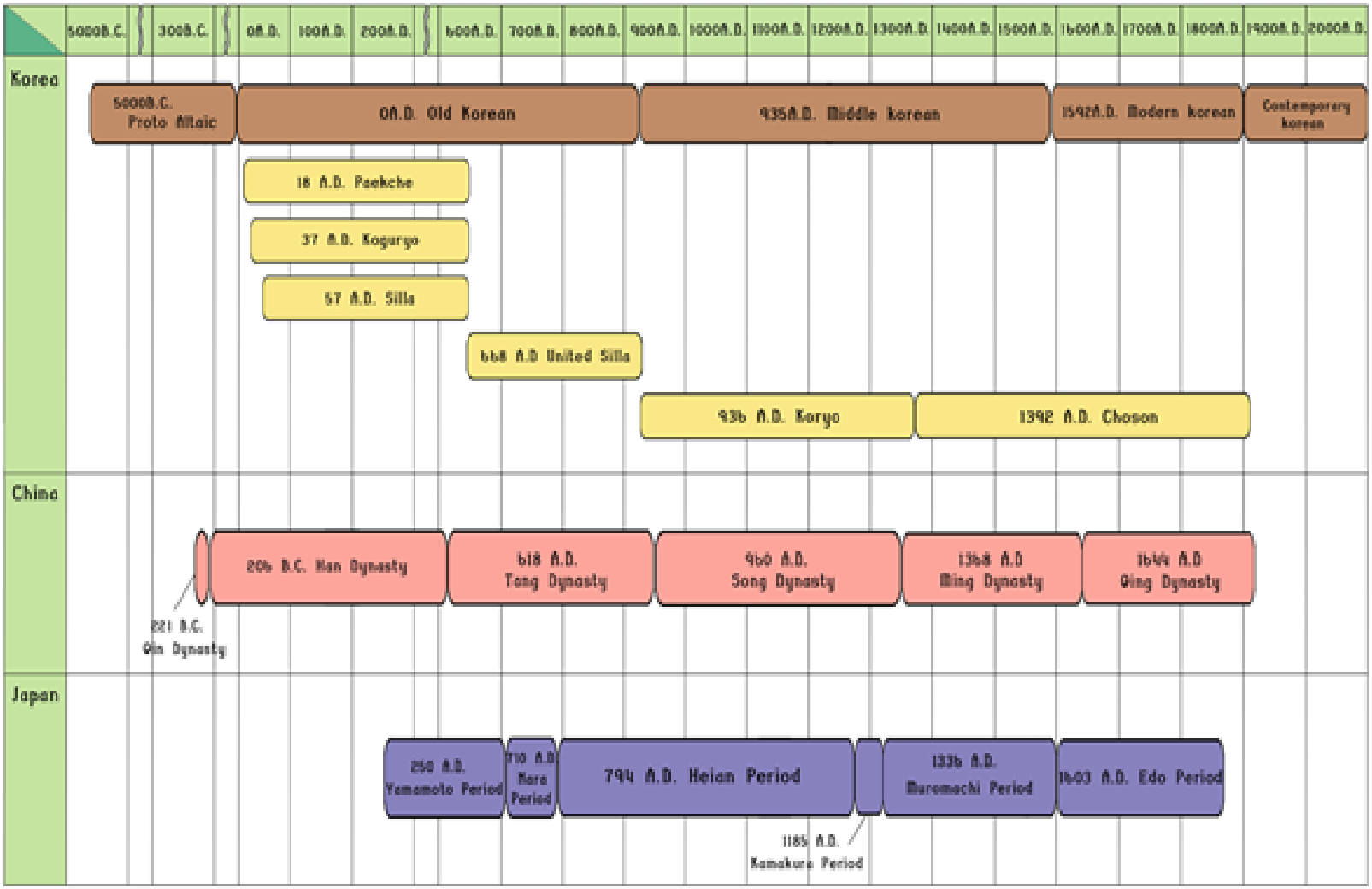
The Sounds of Korean:
Linguistic and practical guide for Korean pronunciation

Dr. Jieun Kiaer and Emily Lord

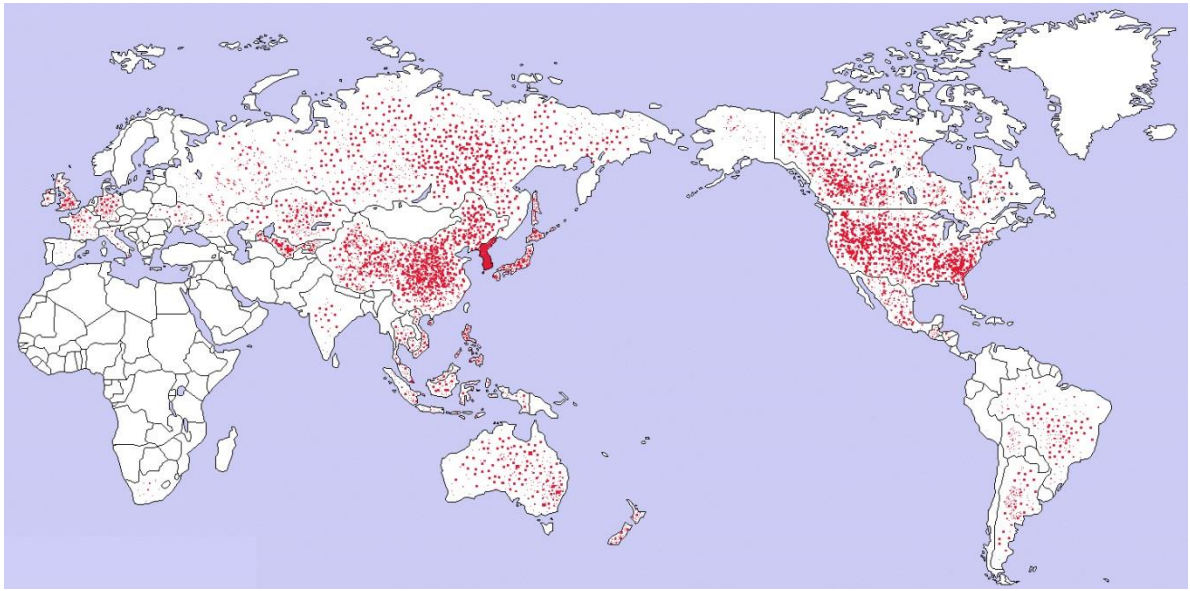
Roadmap

- Characteristics of Korean Language
- Hangeul: Phonetic Alphabet
- Sound Inventory
- A) Consonants
- B) Vowels
- Frequency
- Prosody
- Phonological Rules of Korean
- Pronunciation Clinic (Emily Lord)
- K-Culture and Sounds of Korean (Emily Lord)

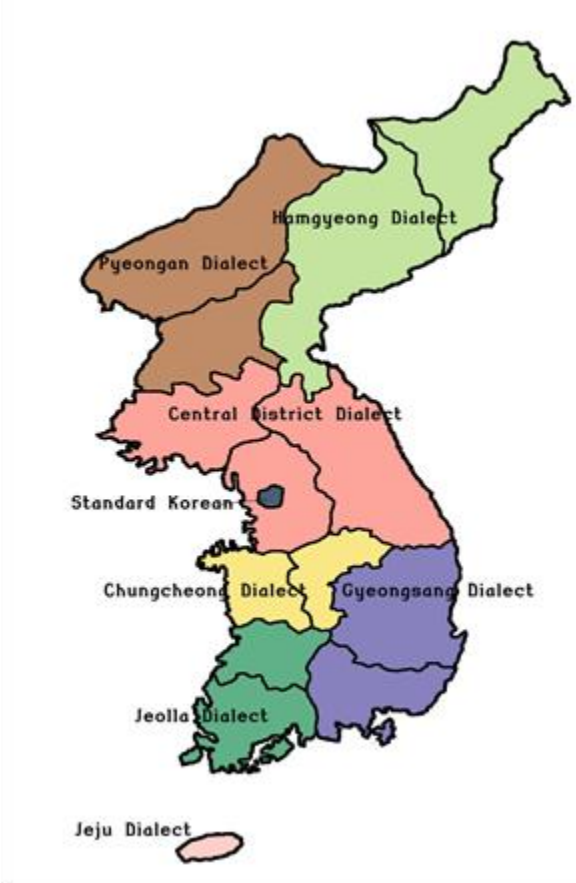
Korean Language in East Asian History



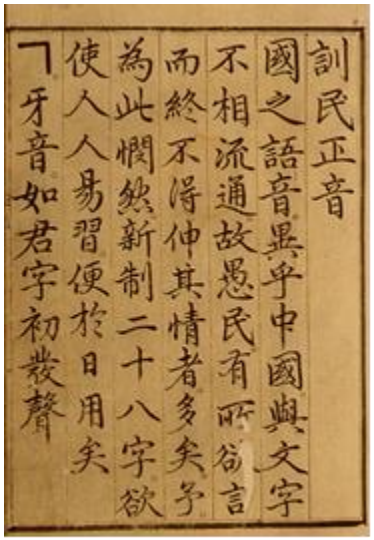
Korean Language: Distribution

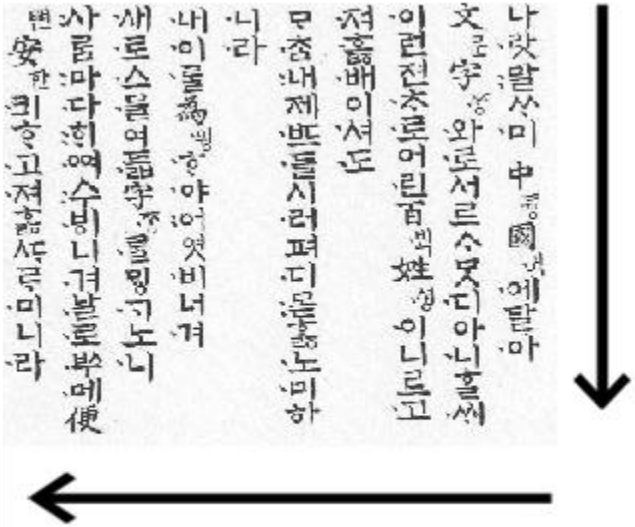


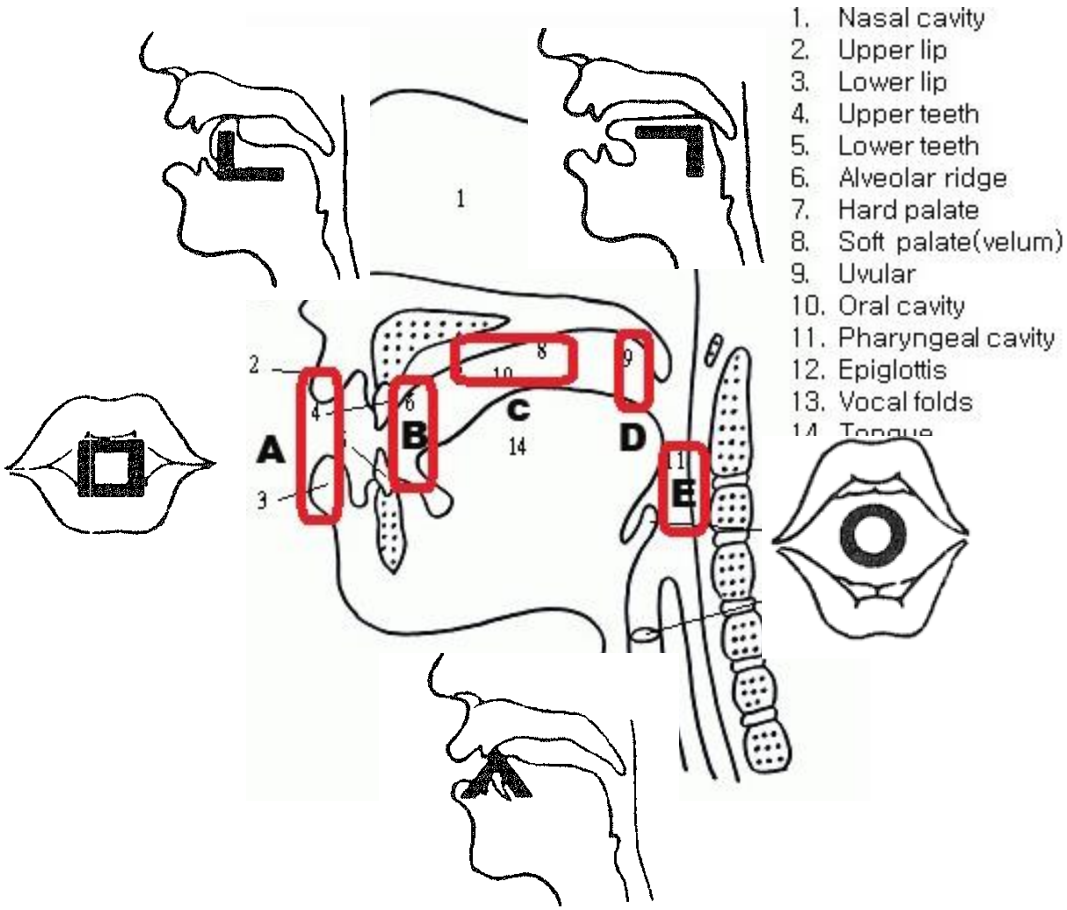
Dialects in Korean



훈민정음 해례 訓民正音 解例 (Hunmin chŏng’ŭm haerye; *Explanations and Examples of Hunminjŏngŭm*) on the left and 훈민정음 언해 訓民正音 諺解 (Hunmin chŏng’ŭm ŏnhae; *Vernacular Translation of Hunminjŏngŭm*) on the right

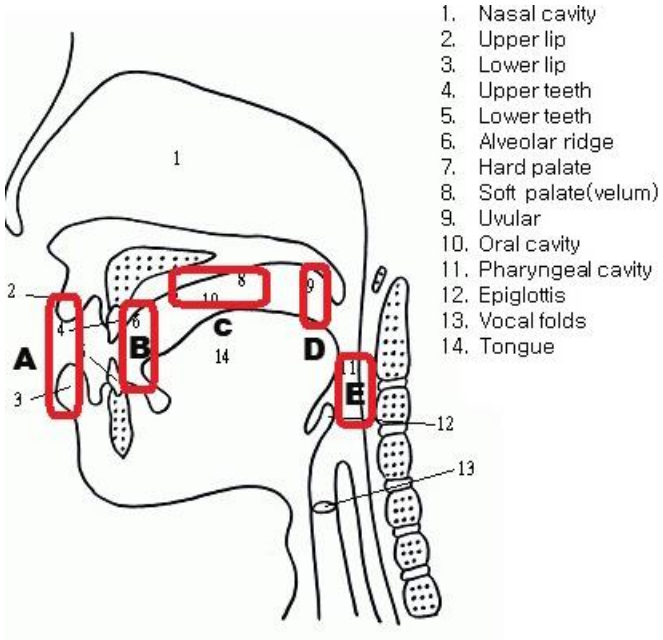




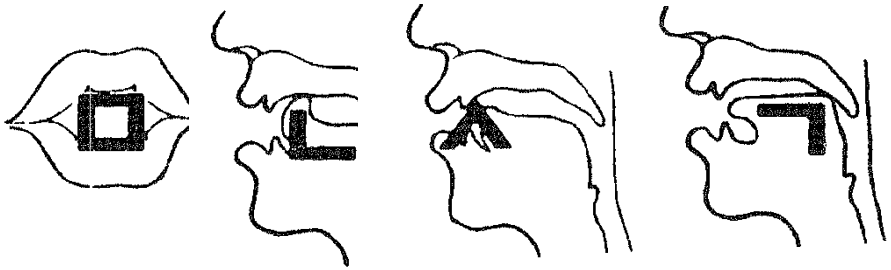


1. Nasal cavity
2. Upper lip
3. Lower lip
4. Upper teeth
5. Lower teeth
6. Alveolar ridge
7. Hard palate
8. Soft palate(velum)
9. Uvular
10. Oral cavity
11. Pharyngeal cavity
12. Epiglottis
13. Vocal folds
14. Tongue

Consonant Inventory



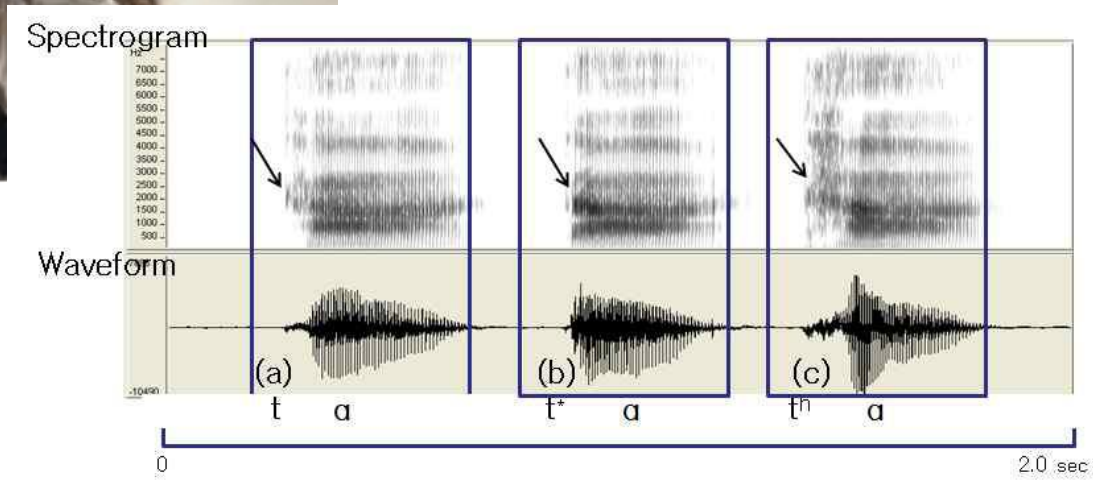
Place of Articulation / Manner of Articulation		A Bilabial	B Alveolar	C Alveolopalatal	D Velar	E Glottal
Stop (Plosive)	Lax	p (ㅂ)	t (ㄷ)		k (ㄱ)	
	Tense	p* (ㅃ)	t* (ㄸ)		k* (ㄲ)	
	Aspirated	pʰ (ㅍ)	tʰ (ㅌ)		kʰ (ㅋ)	
Fricative	Lax		s (ㅅ)			h (ㅎ)
	Tense		s* (ㅆ)			
Affricative	Lax			tɕ (ㅈ)		
	Tense			tɕ* (ㅉ)		
	Aspirated			tɕʰ (ㅊ)		
Nasal		m (ㅁ)	n (ㄴ)		ŋ (ㅇ)	
Liquid (Lateral approximant)			l (ㄹ)			



Three-way contrast in stops

- Three-way contrast in stops
- **<u>Lax/Tensified/Aspirated Forms (cf. Look Similar and Sound Similar)</u>**
- a. 발(foot), 빨(to suck –adnominal form), 팔(arm)
- b. 달(moon), 딸(daughter), 탈(mask)
- c. 갈 (to go –adnominal form) , 깔(to spread), 칼(knife)

Aspiration Test



Dialectic differences in the list of consonants

- DID YOU KNOW…?
- 살 (flesh) or 쌀 (rice?)
- There are few differences in the inventory of consonants between regional dialects. In certain dialects the phonetic realization of consonants is different, but the actual list of consonants is usually the same as that of Standard Korean. However, in certain regional dialects of 경상 *Gyungsang* province, no contrast between ㅅ:ㅆ /s/:/s*/ is observed.

Peter Parker or Spider Man

- Phoneme vs. Phone : Same phoneme or different phoneme?

달(Moon)or 탈(Mask)? : Easy for young children but..?

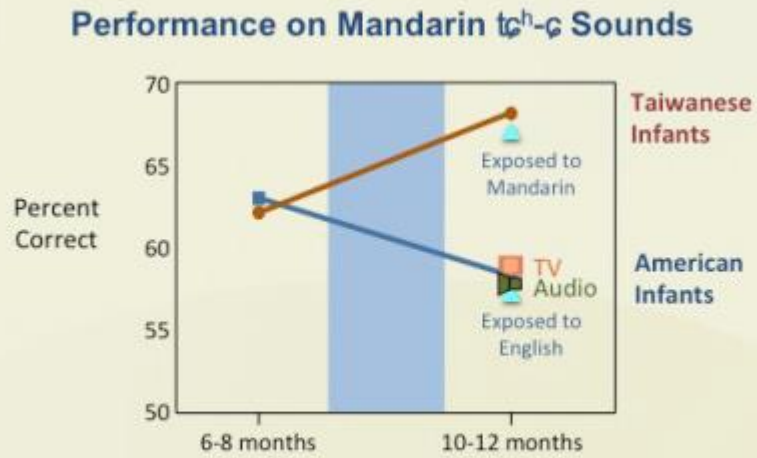
그림 X. 달과 탈

라이스 버거
Two “lice” burgers please!

- This is one of the most common mistakes that native speakers of Korean make when learning English. They fail to distinguish between /r/ and /l/ sounds, which leads them to pronounce them the same.

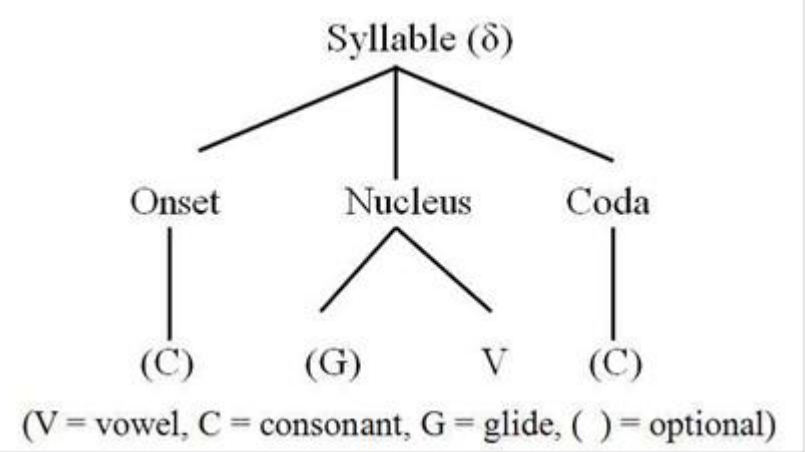
Patricia Kuhl: The linguistic genius of babies (Ted Talk) : 18 month baby

Human Interaction is the Key to Acquire Phoneme Distinction



TED.com presentation: 2011,
http://www.ted.com/talks/patricia_kuhl_the_linguistic_genius_of_babies.html

Syllable Structure in Korean



A language can be classified as either a CV or CVC language, depending on whether or not its syllable structure allows consonants in the coda position. For example, Japanese, Italian and **Spanish** are CV languages, while English, German and Chinese are CVC languages

No Consonant Cluster in Contemporary Korean

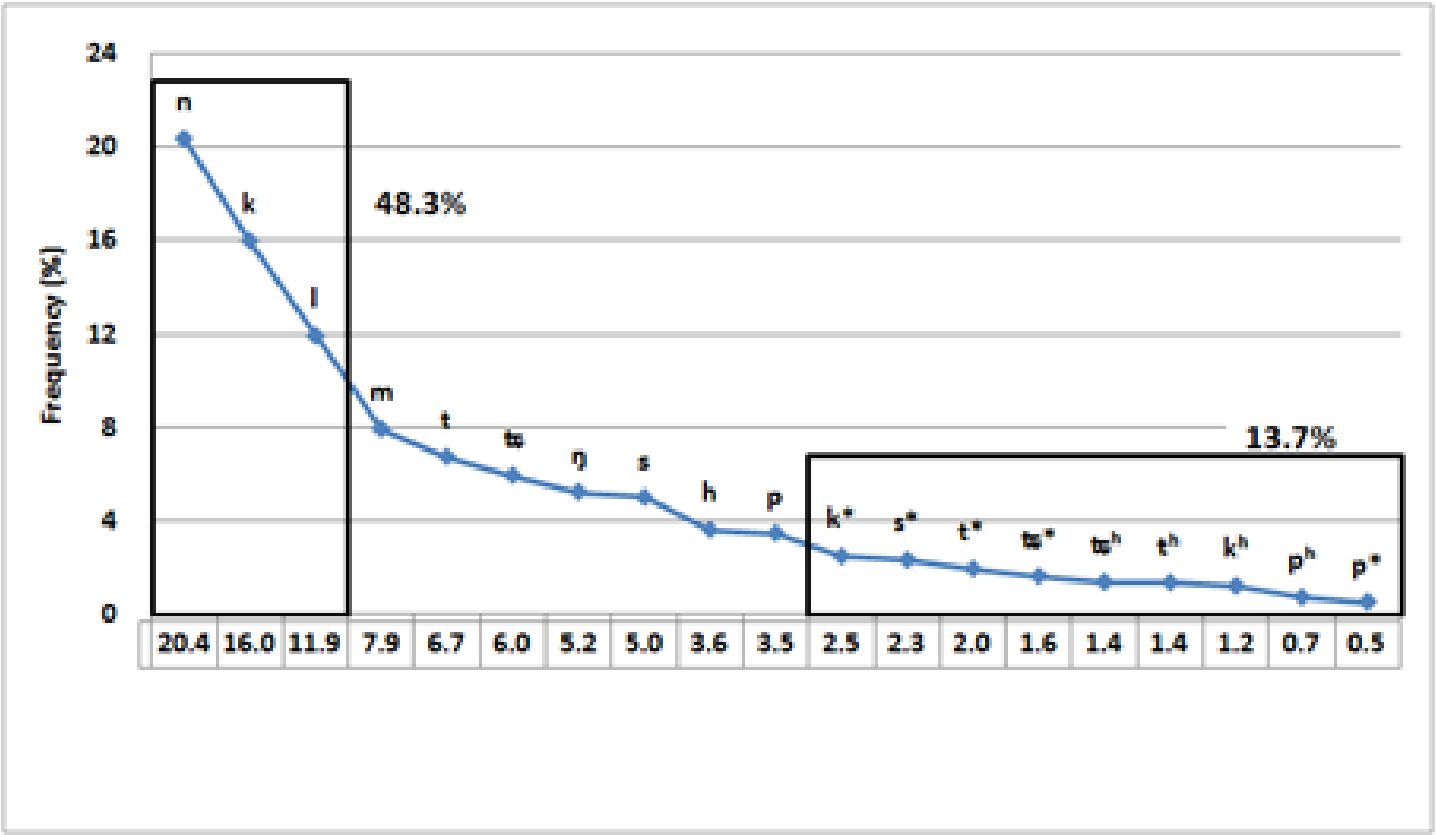
- Moreover, in 15th century Korean, 조 ‘millet’ combines with 쌀 ‘rice’ to produce 좁쌀 ‘millet’. The ㅂ after 조 is the result of 쌀 being at that time

- — Insertion.

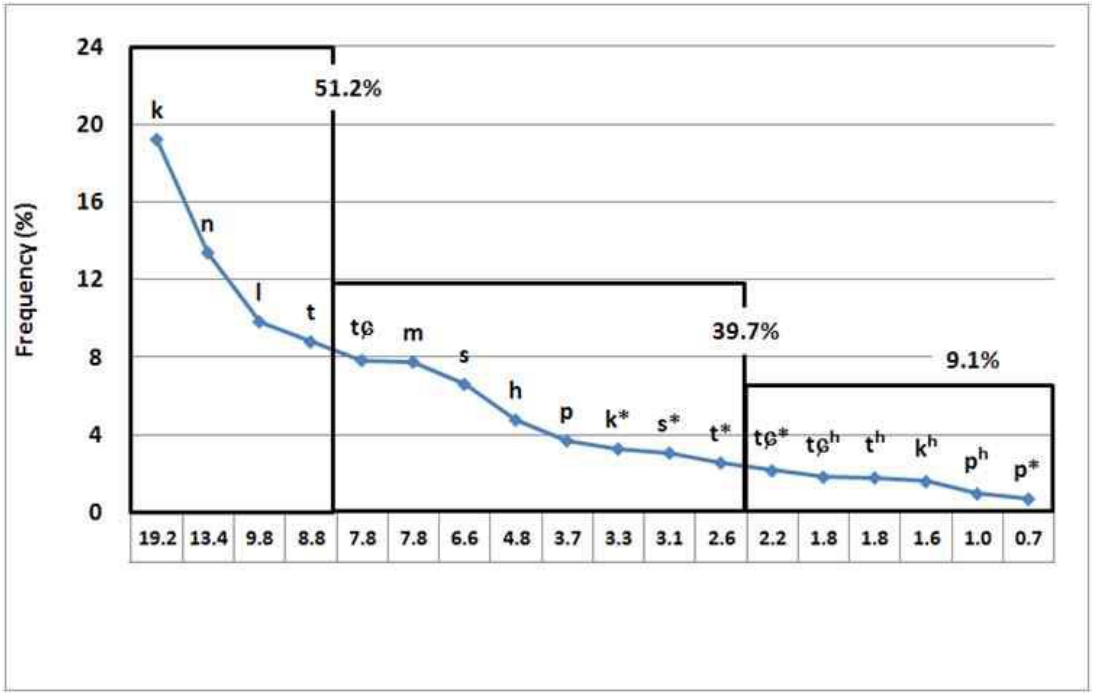
How many syllables?

- • News, boat, strike, silk, tractor, graph
- (뉴스, 보트, 스트라이크, 실크, 트랙터, 그래프)

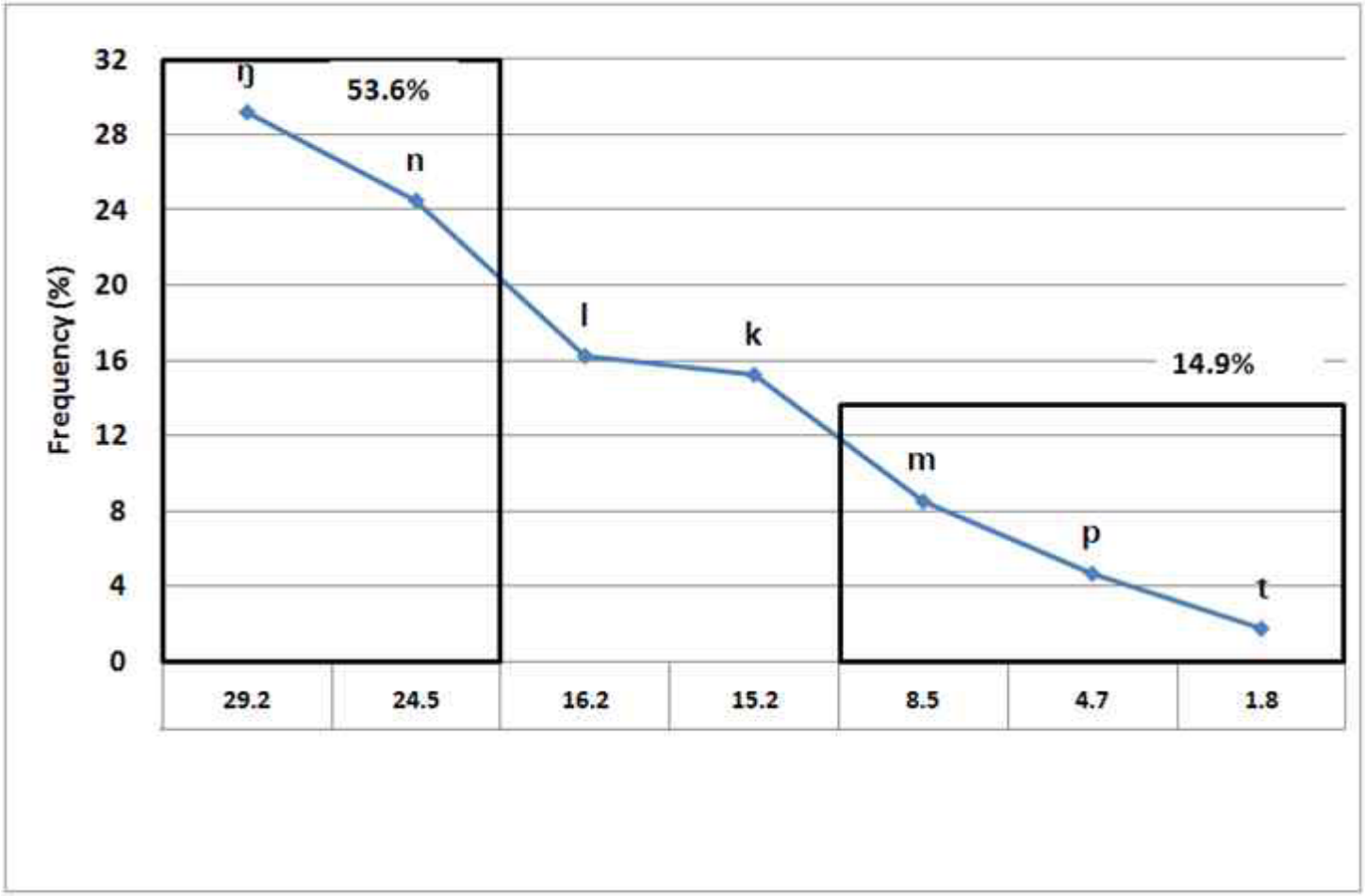
Consonant Frequency (spontaneous speech)



Onset Frequency

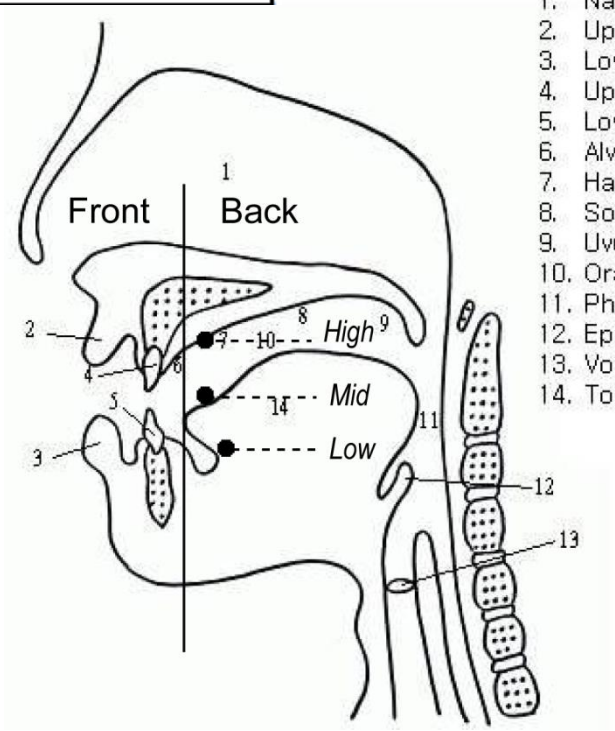


Coda Frequency



Simple Vowels in Korean

Front/Back Height	Front	Back	
	Unrounded	Unrounded	Rounded
High	I ㅣ	ɯ ㅡ	U ㅜ
Mid	ɛ ㅔ/ㅐ	ʌ ㅓ	O ㅗ
Low		ɑ ㅏ	



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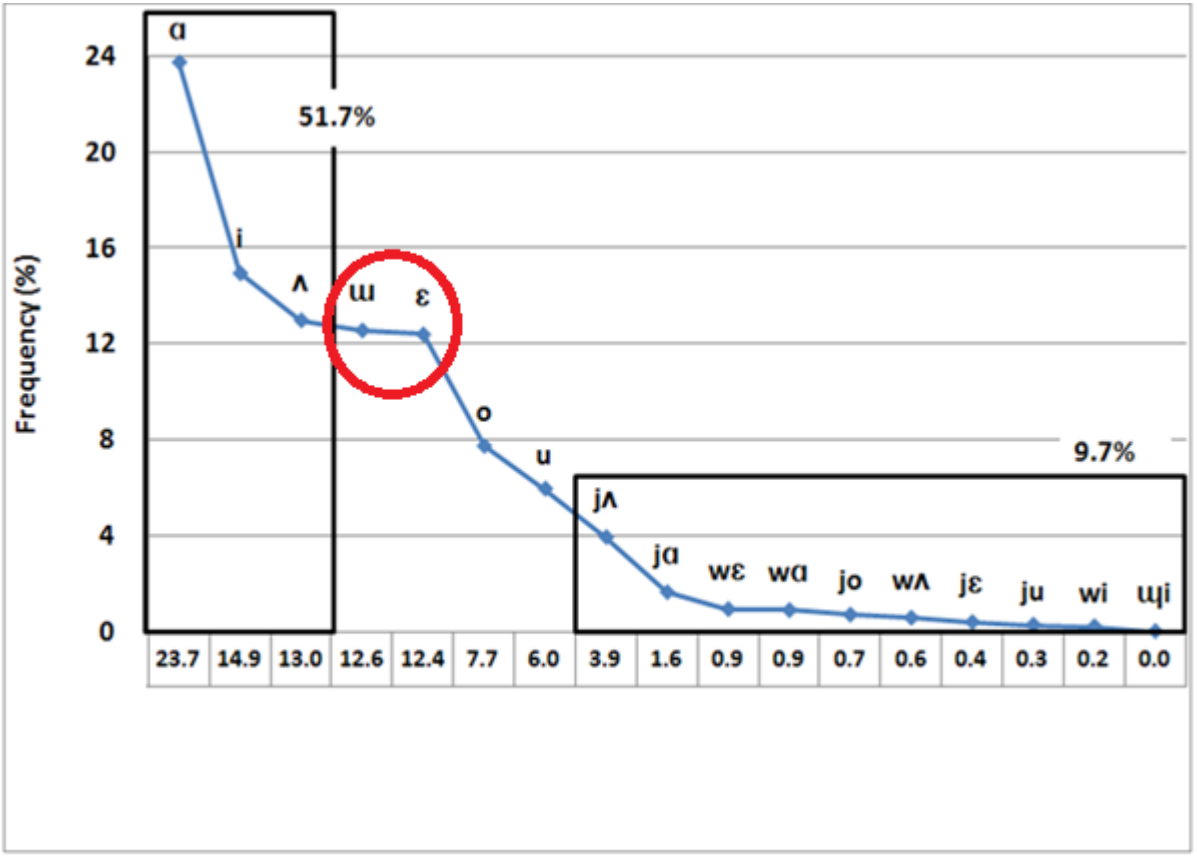
Vowel Frequency (Spontaneous Speech)



Statistical Information Relating to Prosodic Units

	Prosodic Unit	Number
Utterance	Intonational Phrase	1.58
	Phonological Phrase	3.47
	Syllable	11.39
	Phoneme	25.87
Intonational Phrase	Phonological Phrase	2.20
	Syllable	**7.22**
	Phoneme	15.35
Phonological Phrase	Syllable	3.28
	Phoneme	6.98
Syllable	Phoneme	2.13

Intonational Break Matters

-
- a. (아버지가)(방에)(들어가신다)
- [a. pʌ. ʨi. kɑ| pɑŋ. ɛ| tɯ. lʌ. kɑ. sin. tɑ.]
- b. (아버지)(가방에)(들어가신다)
- [a. pʌ. ʨi| kɑ. pɑŋ. ɛ| tɯ. lʌ. kɑ. sin. tɑ.]
- c. (아버지 가방에)(들어가신다)
- [a. pʌ. ʨi. kɑ. pɑŋ. ɛ| tɯ. lʌ. kɑ. sin. tɑ.] (. = syllable boundary, | = minor break boundary)

Example of misphrasing

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yTqNiFDhaPU

그림 X. 내동생고기 (SNL 코리아 한국말 나들이편)

Phrasing matters a lot!

- {내동생}%{고기}: my brother’s flesh !!!
- {내동}%{생고기} : Butcher’s name

Intonation and Mood

- **밥을 먹어(요)?**
- Bap-ul mek-e(yo)?
- 1. Declarative: low tone
- ‘(I) am having a meal’
- 2. Interrogative: high tone
- ‘Are (you) having a meal?’
- 3. Imperative: short low tone ‘Have a meal!’
- 4. Exclamatory: high-low tone ‘Are (you) having a meal!’

Tones in South Korea

We need phonological rules

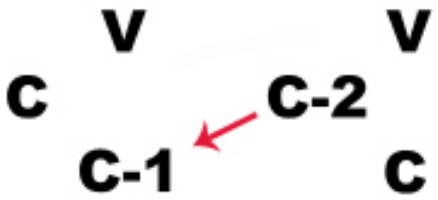
Same word

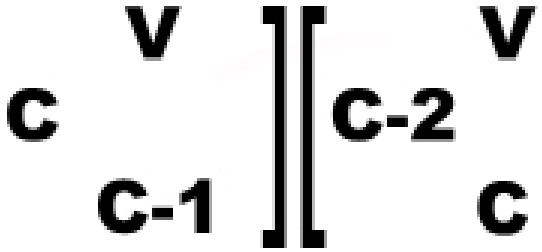
a. **밥** ‘rice, food’; lax sound

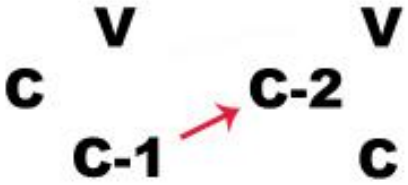
b.국**밥** ‘soup with rice’ (like 빱); tensified sound

c. **밥**물 ‘rice water’ (like 밤): nasalised sound

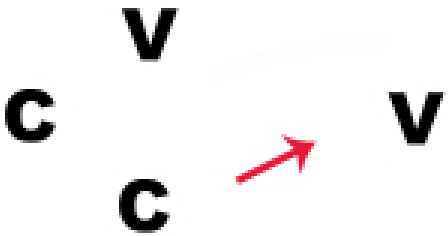
(i) C-2 influences the pronunciation of C-1
or (ii) C-1 influences the pronunciation of C-2







A. Liaison

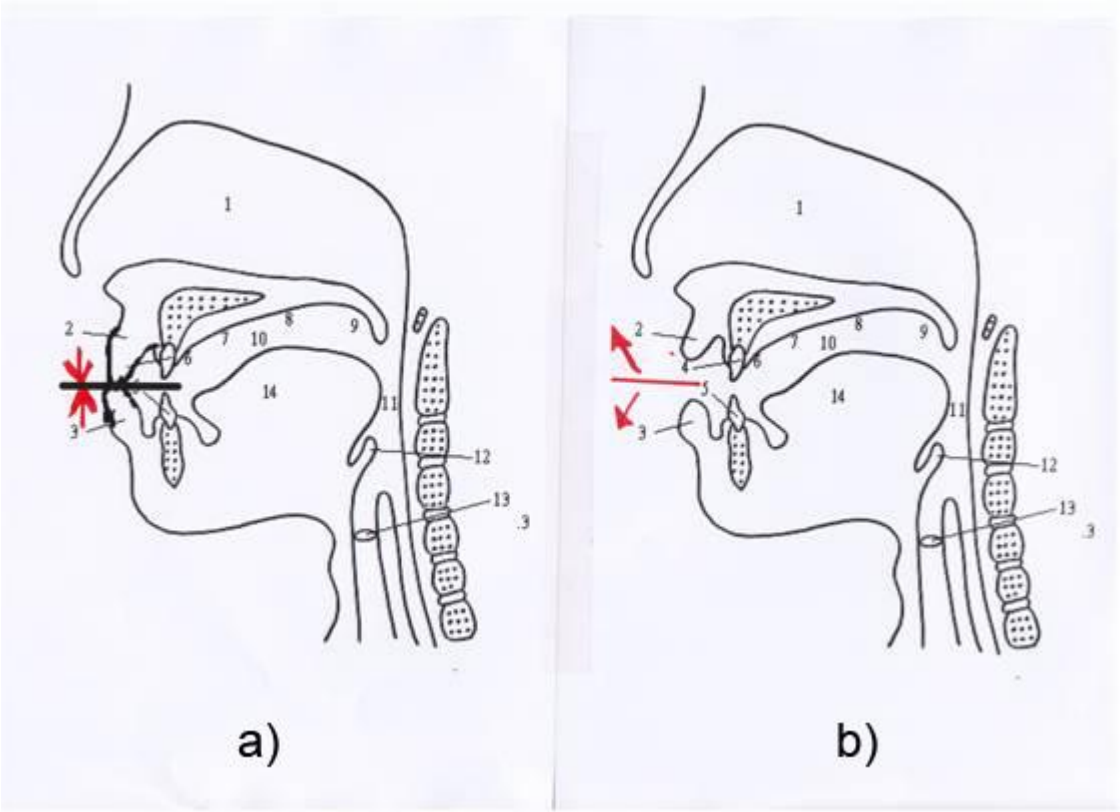


- <u>Liaison applicable</u>
- /옷(clothes)+이(Subj)/ → [오시]: '이' is a subject particle, and therefore a function word.
- <u>Liaison non-applicable (two content words)</u>
- /옷(clothes)+ 안(inside)/ → [옫안] (never pronounced as [오산]) [옫안] is then pronounced as [오단] as a result of liaison.

'안' means inside, so it is a content word.

B. Neutralisation:

Syllable **Final** Sounds must not be released but remain closed, as shown in (a)



Direction of Neutralisation

neutralisation.

		Bilabial	Alveolar	Alveopalatal	Velar	Glottal
Stop (Plosive)	Lax	p (ㅂ)	t (ㄷ)		k (ㄱ)	
	Tense	p^* (ㅃ)	t^* (ㄸ)		k^* (ㄲ)	
	Aspirated	p^h (ㅍ)	t^h (ㅌ)		k^h (ㅋ)	
Fricative	Lax		s (ㅅ)			h (ㅎ)
	Tense		s* (ㅆ)			
Affricative	Lax			tɕ (ㅈ)		
	Tense			$tɕ^*$ (ㅉ)		
	Aspirated			$tɕ^h$ (ㅊ)		

Table 3.7 Direction of Neutralisation

Examples of Neutralisation

- ㅍ → ㅂ: /잎/ ‘leaf’ → [입], /앞/ ‘front’→[압]
- ㅋ→ ㄱ: /부엌/ ‘kitchen’ → [부억]
- ㅌ →ㄷ : /낱/ ‘item’ → [낟], /밭/ ‘field’ → [받]
- ㅅ → ㄷ: /낫/ ‘sickle’ → [낟]
- ㅆ → ㄷ : /샀-/ in 샀다 ‘bought’→ [삳다] → [사따]
- ㅈ→ ㄷ: /찾-/ in 찾다 ‘to search for’ [찾다]→ [차따]
- ㅊ → ㄷ: /낯/ ‘face’ → [낟]
- ㅎ → ㄷ: /닿/ in 닿다 ‘to touch’ → [닫다]→ [다따]
-

Culture Corner

- Korean cinema is a great way to practice your Korean pronunciation.

- By listening to native speakers in film, TV shows, or on podcasts, you can familiarise yourself with not only pronunciation, but cadence and intonation.

Culture Corner

- K-cinema can also introduce you to the various dialects of Korean and regional differences.
- This clip shows the differences in ㅡ and ㅓ in the Gyeongsang and Jeolla dialects.

https://youtu.be/HKZARDXVdZc

Culture Corner

- The Gyeongsang dialect merges the ㅡ and ㅓ vowel, pronouncing both sounds as ㅓ.
- Since the 1980s, non-Seoul dialects have appeared more frequently in Korean cinema, exposes both native speakers and language learners to various regional differences.

Selected References

- Shin, Kiaer and Chaa (2012), *The Sounds of Korean*, Cambridge University Press.
- Kim, Jin-young (2011), *Meet the In-Laws,* Lotte Entertainment.