

## Problems Faced in Korean Language Education in Manipur University

Dr. L. Iboyaima Singh, M.A., M.Phil, Ph.D.

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### Abstract

Problems of teaching and learning Korean language in Indian context are discussed in this paper. Issues relating to Korean language teaching and learning at the Manipur University are identified and some solutions to solve these problems are suggested. Some contrastive elements between English, Manipuri and Korean are identified. Several problems at the sound level, word level, sentence level and meaning level are identified.

**Key words:** Korean language teaching, Indian contexts, problems faced in learning Korean

### 1. Introduction

The much awaited Korean Language course began in September 2012 in Manipur University. It is now a well-known fact that the people of Manipur, especially the youth, are very drawn to Korea and its culture. It is due to this emulation towards Korean culture that the university has finally started a one year certificate course in Korean language. The programme has about 12 students enrolled in the current academic session, i.e., 2013-2014. Though the programme is in its nascent stage, it is focusing on motivating the learners to further take up Korean language studies more seriously.

### Methodology

The paper is based on the students who are enrolled in the university for the academic session of 2013-2014. The data for the study was collected from the tasks assigned to the learners during their classes. The errors they make while attempting the tasks are focused in this paper. The teacher has been able to identify the problematic areas with the help of error analysis. The tasks include reading comprehension, writing short paragraphs, role plays, giving speech in

Korean, and so on. The learners were observed for a period of six months after they started the learning process.

## Results Obtained

Learning a foreign language at a later stage in life takes immense effort from the learners to be able to use the foreign tongue correctly. Many psycholinguists are of the view that human beings find it easier to learn any language in early years. It becomes difficult as the age increases.

## Common Problems

The common problems faced by an adult while learning a new language stem from the fact that these adult learners are already equipped with at least one language to communicate. Often the errors made by these learners are related to their first language.

The Korean language learners in Manipur University also face most of the common problems cited above. The learners who have enrolled in the university have some idea about certain expressions and phrases in Korean. For instance,

1. 날씨가춡습니다. (nalsigachupsYmnida)  
‘The weather is cold’
2. 선생님, 내일봐요. (s□nsENNim, nEilbayo)  
‘Teacher, see you tomorrow’
3. 선생님, 고마워요. (s□nsENNim, gomaw□yo)  
‘Thank you teacher’
4. 안녕, 선생님. (anny□N, s□nsENNim)  
‘Hello teacher’

The expressions given above are known to them before the beginning of the course. What seems to be a blessing initially becomes an obstacle when formal learning begins. The most important part of language learning gets a little hampered due to lack of knowledge of Korean culture. This is one of the main reasons why they end up using slang words in the classroom. They learn them from Korean songs and try to use them in class. This is in contrast with the

course structure. They are introduced to the alphabets and then to words which further leads to sentences. It is only then that they are taught about the proper way of greeting and addressing people. It becomes difficult for them to ‘unlearn’ whatever Korean that they had picked up from watching dramas and movies. The first problem they face is memorizing and concentrating only on the formal way of speech. At this point, they need to learn slowly along with the cultural part of the target language.

### **Difficulties at the Sound Level**

The learners begin with making mistakes from the sound level or the alphabetical level, i.e., they face problems while producing the correct pronunciation at phonetic level. The sounds which are absent in their mother tongue namely, Manipuri, pose a serious problem while speaking. These sounds are ㅅ[s], ㅈ[j] and ㅊ[chh] sounds. Due to this reason they also face problems in producing ㅆ[ss] and ㅈ [s] sounds. This further leads to difficulties in listening skills. The reason is because the students have learned these sounds as s sound so while testing their listening skills they invariably perceive them as s sound, eventually making enormous mistakes.

Owing to the difficulty at the sound level, the problem is carried forward to the word level. The absence of laboratory training of the Korean speech sounds has its direct effect on the production of Korean words. For example, the errors the students make constantly are as follows:

1. 색(sEk) instead of 책(chhEk) meaning ‘book’
1. 책상(sEksaN) instead of 책상 (chhEksaN) ‘desk’
2. 극상(kYksaN) instead of 극장 (kYkcaN) meaning ‘cinema hall’
3. 술구 (sulgu) instead of 출구(chhulgu) meaning ‘exit’
4. 흐와요일(hYwayoil) instead of 화요일(hwayoil) meaning ‘Tuesday’

The sounds [ch] is absent in Manipuri. Even when they use Hindi words like ‘chhata’ meaning umbrella they always say ‘sata’. The mother tongue influence, therefore, is the hardest to overcome. The errors occur also because of the absence of the sound combination in Manipuri. There is no permissible word in Manipuri that begins with the sound 화[hwa]. The option then left to the students is to insert a vowel on their own between ㅎ[h] and 오[wa] to be able to produce the Korean word. If the students practice the words in isolation, they are more careful to avoid making mistakes.

### Difficulties at the Word Level

A major problem arises when the students are asked to speak using these same words in complete sentences. The erroneous production of Korean sentences by the students tends to render a strange meaning far removed from the target sentence. One of the most problematic sentences that they have come across so far is - -

1. (a) 책상위에책과연필도있습니다. (chhEksaNwiΘchhEgwa y□nphildoissYmnida)

‘There are books and pencil also on the desk’

The students usually end up saying-

2. (b) 색상위에색과연필도있습니다. (sEksaNwiΘchhEgwa y□nphildoissYmnida)

Roughly the meaning of this sentence is ‘There are colour and pencil also on the colour tone’.

Apart from this type of errors, the students also find it very difficult to keep up with the ‘Patchim’ rules. In trying to memorize these rules they forget to apply them while speaking in Korean. There are many such instances, but the prominent ones are given below:

1. The rule of ㄹ[r] (patchim) changing from [l] sound to [r] sound when followed by a vowel.

Example, while using the word 일요일(iryoil) meaning ‘Sunday’, the students often make mistakes by pronouncing it as ‘ilyoil’ instead of ‘iryoil’.

2. Another rule of tensification in words like 학교(hakkyo) which they speak as *hakgyo*.

The simple explanation for this rule is that while speaking a string of sounds to form words the phonotactic rules play a major role to simplify normal speech. This implies that the string of sounds, namely, 학교(hakgyo) will become 하교(hakkyo) forming the ‘ㄱ’ [kk] alphabet. These rules of Korean are evident enough for the scientific nature of its language design.

### Problems at the Sentence Level

Sentence level also creates many problems for the learners. From the very beginning the learners are taught to focus on the endings. They usually get mixed up between formal and informal endings. For instance, while talking to the teacher-

1. 내일봐요. (nEilbayo)

‘See you tomorrow’ (instead of)

내일뵈겠습니다. (nEilbwebgΘsYmnida)

The three tenses sometimes create a problem for the learners. It becomes pertinent for them to master the rules of forming different kinds of endings to be able to use the target language correctly. Apart from the endings, the concept of come (오다) (oda) and go (가다) (gada) based on the positioning of the speaker and hearer takes some time for them to learn. The problem starts from using the expression of seeking permission to enter the classroom.

- a. 들어갈수있습니다.(dYr□gal suissYmnida) (literally meaning may I go in)

‘May I come in.’

- b. 들어오십시오. (dYr□osibsio)

‘Please come in.’

In Manipuri, the same expression is used as -

c. m□nuN c□Nj□r□ke? (literally meaning may I enter)

‘May I come in.’

d. c□Nbir□ko.

‘Please come.’

In the Manipuri sentences, the two expressions use the same verb changba which means ‘enter’. However, in the Korean counterpart there are two verbs used, i.e., 들어가다(dYr□gada) (to go in) and 들어오다(dYr□oda) (to come in). Thus, these varying concepts are a point of concern for the beginners.

## **Other Issues**

The employability aspect by Korean companies based in India includes the speech proficiency in English, Korean and Hindi. Keeping this in mind, the development of speech and linguistic skills of these learners is not limited to their Korean proficiency alone. They also face problems while speaking in English. This implies that improving spoken English becomes vital while learning to speak the foreign language. The absence of environment to test and practice their linguistic skills in the different languages does hamper their skill development eventually slowing down the learning progress. This further has an adverse impact on the motivation level of the students. The confinement in one corner of the world has the effect of just compromising with the little opportunities that any course offers. What they really need is to have realizable and tangible dreams to self-motivate and gradually progress in the language development. It is only then that their distant dream of visiting Korea will eventually become realizable.

## **Discussion**

### **Inadequate Number of Faculty Members**

Any foreign language teaching comprises of at least six important modules. They are speech skills, writing skills, reading capability, listening skills, grammar and understanding culture. These six modules need to be taught in a parallel way for producing good speakers of the

target language. To run a foreign language course smoothly, it requires at least two teachers to focus on these different modules. The major problem that the department faces is the lack of more faculty members. Only one faculty member managing these six different skills seems complicated. It so happens that when the teacher focuses on the speech skills it has an adverse effect on their writing skills.

### **Need for Understanding Some Linguistic Concepts**

Apart from single-handedly tackling the whole course, the teacher, though not a native speaker of Korean, has to use some special phonetic skills to help the students improve their Korean pronunciation. The instructor has to understand and figure out what sounds are known to the learners and what sounds are new for them. For instance, some sounds are found to be similar in English, Manipuri and Korean, but some sounds are unique to Korean alone. These special sounds are the focus of teaching process since the students usually make mistakes while pronouncing them. The vowel ‘으’ [Y] is absent in Manipuri. Therefore, while making the students learn this sound, the teacher has to know some phonetic features of the vowel to help them use their speech organs correctly. The students are asked to produce the vowel sound [u] with unrounded lips. It is only then that the vowel is produced correctly. However, this is a time consuming effort.

### **Difficulties Faced While Teaching Grammar**

Even while teaching grammar, the teacher has to be equipped with more knowledge about the grammar of the students’ mother tongue. Grammatically Korean and English are different. Therefore, to explain the grammatical patterns of Korean, the teacher has to resort to using similar grammatical rules found in languages like Hindi and Manipuri. This implies that the teacher has to make an enormous effort to learn more about grammar of other languages already known to the learners along with Korean grammar.

For example, the use of 2<sup>nd</sup> person is limited in Korean as well as Manipuri. Hindi behaves differently here as it has an honorific form and colloquial for 2<sup>nd</sup> person i.e. ‘*aap*’ and ‘*tum*’. In this case equating Korean with Manipuri helps the students to understand the cultural and pragmatic aspect of the use of 2<sup>nd</sup> person.

The students have problems in figuring out grammatical particles and often write incomplete or incorrect sentences. For example, they are given the task of writing sentences like-

1. 책이책상위에있습니다. (chhEgichhEsaNwiΘissYmnida)

‘There is a book on the desk’.

The learners sometimes come up with the expression given below which is without the locative particle -에[Θ] rendering the sentence as incorrect.

2. \*책이책상위있습니다. (chhEgichhEksaNwi issYmnida)

‘There is a book on the desk’.

The teacher tries to help avoid such blunders by equating them with the Manipuri counterpart. It is only then that they realize how incomplete the sentence sounds with a missing grammatical particle. Thus with proper guidance it becomes a little easier for them to frame Korean sentences and making minimum errors. The task of the teacher is to analyse the errors of the students and then come up with a strategy to help them overcome these errors from the very beginning.

### **Focusing on Spoken English**

It is also an uphill task for the teacher to improve their Spoken English. The teacher has to provide environments for the students to practice both English and Korean after the classroom activities end. The only place where they can actually use these languages is in the classroom. This is why proper monitoring of their speech is of prime importance. The students are called half an hour before the class to converse in Korean with each other. During this period the teacher sits close by in the next room to guide them better during the class.

This kind of approach leads to apprising the students about the history and culture of Korea. It becomes more interesting for them when they are told about the similarities and dissimilarities between Korean culture and their own culture. It helps in removing the foreign aspect of the target language and also draws the students’ minds towards a better understanding



of the target language. This will in turn help in facilitating improved development Korean language.

### **Possible Solutions**

At this point, Manipur University needs more faculty members urgently. This is one requirement that needs immediate attention to introduce more language development programmes. Only then, the department can introduce diploma and advanced Korean language courses. The teachers also need to be well-equipped with linguistic concepts to further boost their teaching capabilities.

To effectively help the learners, the teachers need to be properly trained with necessary tools. The department also has to be equipped with teaching materials and guide to further improve the language course. This includes the technical aspect like proper language laboratory, library and so on. The department is currently trying to get the local cable connection which airs KBS world and Arirang channels. These channels can be used a little later as an aid to the Korean language learning process. With a little bit of understanding of basic Korean grammar, culture and its history, students can watch those same Korean movies and dramas from a fresh and different perspective. This is because by now they would understand the methods of language use and know what kind of speech is appropriate for the given situation. With this kind of approach the teacher can utilize the students' own knowledge of Korean for improving their linguistic skills in a holistic way.

The department is also considering starting a separate Spoken English course or a paper to further enhance the language skills of the students. This Spoken English course might be made compulsory for all the students. The students of Thai and Japanese language courses will also be put through the same Spoken English course. This will help reduce the burden on the language teachers and assist them in focusing on their respective language courses. This step is, however, under consideration. It is still in a proposal stage which needs further approval.

### **Conclusion**

The programme is very much in its initial stages where nothing much can be ascertained about the value of the programme. However, with the right kind of publicity it can attract more

and more number of students to increase the size of the department. With more well-trained teachers the students can be motivated further to take up Korean language course seriously. This will enable them to open up more opportunities in fields of research work, company jobs and even pursue further studies in the line of Korean Studies as a subject. Thus the department can also start a separate subject called 'Korean Studies' along with Korean language course in the future.

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**Dr. L. Iboyaima Singh**

Address for correspondence  
House no.16, Block-B

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Dr. L. Iboyaima Singh, M.A., M.Phil, Ph.D.

Problems faced in Korean Language Education in Manipur University

Preet Vihar  
New Delhi-110092  
India

Permanent address

c/o A. Romenkumar Singh  
Keisamthong Ahanthem Leikai  
Imphal - 795001  
Manipur  
India  
[iboyaimas@gmail.com](mailto:iboyaimas@gmail.com)