

## The Advantages of Using Devnagri Script in Teaching Korean Language

Dr. Ahanthem Romita Devi

### Abstract

This paper attempts to outline the aims and objectives of Korean language learning in University of Delhi by highlighting the unique method devised by Prof. Do-young Kim of using Devnagri script while teaching Korean. The paper also tries to bring out the difficulties faced by the language educators and accordingly offers some suggestions to make the teaching process a less cumbersome one. Basic knowledge of Linguistics may ease the burden of teaching a foreign tongue to adult learners who already have acquired L1. Using L1 while teaching L2 as tool which has been used by many in the past. Thus the paper puts stress on this method coupled with linguistic tools to facilitate the language learning process.

**Keywords:** acquisition, learning, Korean, language teaching.

### Introduction

Normally, when a child starts acquiring a language, the child in the initial stages starts producing sounds, which is gradually combined into some forms of sound pattern. These sound patterns emerge as words, which is then combined to form phrases and in no time the child is capable of narrating events, stories, asking questions and so on. In all by the age of four the child is a competent speaker of the language he/she has been exposed to.

To acquire a language means to gradually develop linguistic abilities through communicative situations and events. It is a natural process. The driving force behind the child's eagerness to acquire a language is to be able to communicate. The child is ultimately able to achieve his/her objective with ease and speed with the help of the biological endowment of a language faculty.

On the other hand, learning refers to the conscious effort to accumulate knowledge of the grammar and vocabulary of a language. The objective of learning a second / foreign language is more or less need-based as compared to the spontaneous and natural way of acquisition of L1 by the child. L2 learning has to be looked at differently because the learner already knows a language with which s/he can communicate. This proves to be a kind of a barrier in L2 learning. So to learn second language (L2) they will have to overcome acquisition barriers in the sense that the learners resort to speaking in L1 once they are out of the classroom. The other forms of barrier can be limitation regarding the numbers hours provided for learning the language in a week, attitude of the learner towards L2 and so on. Thus, to motivate the learners and to capture their interest in the L2, these barriers need to be filtered out. Thus, the ideal learner would be one who has a genuine interest to learn the language. This will help facilitate the learning process in an effective manner.

### **Brief History of Foreign Language Teaching**

Foreign language teaching in Europe can be traced back to the times of the Greeks (Bell, 1981). In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the mother tongue or L1 was used while teaching L2, while during the Renaissance L1 was rarely used. Bell(1981), traces L2 learning from the Renaissance as it is the basis for L2 teaching in the subsequent centuries, namely the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century. During the Renaissance, language teachers were more inclined towards communication skills of L2 learners. By the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there was a shift in the focus from speech to writing and learning grammar by rote .The Renaissance period focused more on the learner being able to communicate in L2, while the 19<sup>th</sup> century teaching focused more on learning the L2 grammar in order to enable the learner to write correctly. This shift came about due to the attitude of the scholars of the 19<sup>th</sup> century towards the verbal aspect of language. For them the verbal aspect of language was of a lesser variety, as it was full of errors. The purer form of language was that of the written part that too the standard forms of the language laid down in the past.

This translation method, which was popular in the 19<sup>th</sup> century used Latin as the perfect model (the Universal Grammar). This resulted in treating anything falling outside the description

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Dr. Ahanthem Romita Devi

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of Latin as incorrect or ungrammatical. Thus, the learner had to pay attention to what was prohibited as compared to what was permitted.

Traditionally, mother tongue or L1 was used as and when the need arose while teaching L2. Bell calls this method as 'a semi-direct method' because the L2 trainer used L1 only when it was necessary. As the 19<sup>th</sup> century approached, the trainers used more of L1, as the learners were mostly taught L2 grammar and L2 writing system (Bell, 1981).

Marking this complete shift from a direct way of teaching L2 to a more prescriptive method in the 19<sup>th</sup> century created problems for the trainers while teaching the language to the non-natives. Practically there was confusion as to how much of a colloquial form could be permitted in teaching a language to the non-natives. This means that to teach English as a foreign language would mean to set a standard form for the learners, i.e., British English. But English has a lot of varieties, namely American, Australian, Indian English and so on.

This led to the proposition of two models viz., the Metropolitan model and the Local model. The Metropolitan model picks a variety closer to the learner, in which the elite of the community speaks. This implies that a lot of publications, dictionary, T.V. programmes and so on are available to the learner. The Local model chooses a variety which is more colloquial in nature. The only problem in adopting this model is that there will be no publications, dictionaries available to the learner of the local variety of language. Thus, the learner will not learn the language at a conscious level and will remain a speaker of the local variety. The solution that offered was to combine the two models in such a way that a teacher acknowledges the local variety and tries to bridge the colloquial form and the formal system of English.

By the later half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, linguists like Henry Sweet, Otto Jespersen and Harold Palmer gave different viewpoints for language teaching (Bell, 1981). According to them, language is a system comprising of elements, which operate in terms of rules and these rules are mostly in relation to each other to complete the edifice of language. By this time, these scholars brought the emphasis back to speech rather than the written aspect of language. The emphasis on the correctness was no longer the central idea of L2 teaching. It became more of appropriate in

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certain contexts and situation. Language is also a socio-cultural phenomenon and thus specific situational and contextual use of language was considered far more important than anything else in teaching the language.

According to Palmer (1921), L2 learning takes place in a specific way. First, the learner picks up L2 sounds and tones (in specific cases), and produces them in isolation or in combination. Secondly, the learners memorized a set number of sentences, complete and grammatical without actually analyzing them. The teacher or trainer selects these sentences. Thirdly, the learner is able to construct irregular and regular sentences. This order is almost a reverse of traditional method, where the learner is trained to write words and subsequently taught to read out loud.

### **The Korean Language Teaching Programme in Manipur University**

Speech has to be the focal point because in the natural course of language acquisition a child learns how to speak first and gradually learn how to write. The current Korean Language Programme also adopts the above-mentioned pattern and is designed to follow Palmer's order where beginners are trained to produce the sounds of Korean, then combine them in various units of the building blocks of language teaching/learning. This initial training in the sound system helps the learner to adjust various facial muscles to produce the sounds correctly. This is followed by memorizing a number of sentences.

During these sessions the required grammatical components of the language are also covered. With each subsequent chapter, the learner is engaged into a gradual progression of learning with various basic aspects of the language. After each chapter is covered, the learner is then asked to produce the sentences on their own.

The syllabus very clearly covers the accurate and required grammatical aspects and includes the situational use of Korean Language. The notional aspect of the syllabus where the meaning or semantic knowledge is taught is also one of the prime concerns of the trainer. The reason behind this is the very nature of Korean Language, which is more of a situational language. The course content thus, trains the learners to speak Korean in all possible contexts

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keeping in mind the honorific, formal and informal situations of language use. The course design for the beginners is more of a situational and notional one. This helps in equipping the beginners with certain tools, which are helpful in seeking information as well as give information to the native speakers (Koreans). In other words, the learner by the end of the first year programme should be able to converse with a Korean in almost all basic situations.

While planning the part time Korean language course in University of Delhi, which actually began in 2003, a very innovative way was devised by Prof. Do Young Kim in 2006, to use the Devnagari script in the text book called 'Bharati Korean I' to guide the readers for the correct pronunciation of target words in Korean. Using phonetic symbols would mean that the teachers have to train the learners first in basic phonetics. Due to the limitation of time, Prof. Kim came up with the idea of using Hindi script to economize time. Hindi, apart from being the Official language, is also known and spoken by the majority of people in India. Based on this fact, such a technique has been adopted to help the beginners pick up Korean faster. It is a unique method of economizing on the time taken to introduce new sound system of Korean to the learners. Apart from this, the book also has some Korean conversations set in Indian contexts (Pages 109-111, 127-129, 155-156, etc.).

The students who learn Korean in Manipur University come from a variety of fields of study like Science, Humanities, Social Science, Engineering and so on. Therefore, to introduce phonetic symbols along with Hangeul (Korean) script to the beginners is a time consuming process. Most of the beginners have more or less no idea about difficult and different sounds of Korean language, so the Hindi pronunciation part of the Korean words provides them a sense of easiness and even familiarity with the sounds of the foreign language. They are already shown the equivalent sounds in Hindi as well as in Korean. This helps the teacher in focusing on the different sounds of Korean which is absent in Hindi or Manipuri. For instance, the Korean vowel sound [U] does not have an equivalent in Hindi or Manipuri. The language instructor devises appropriate phonetic drills to teach this new sound. However, a question, though, remains in mind as to how a student who is not familiar with the Hindi script would benefit from this. The suggestion for such students could be that they pick up Korean with the help of Korean script itself. As the course progresses, this proves advantageous for them as they learn to read Korean

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from the very beginning of the course. Though they may start out slowly, but gradually they are at par with the Hindi speakers.

Such a technique opens up a window of opportunities for further research in Korean language. Linguistically India is a diverse country. Korean is taught in Manipur University, therefore a similar method can be adopted in writing Korean pronunciation in the Meitei script or Bengali script. This is also based on the assumption that the majority of the community can produce the correct pronunciation in the Manipuri script. Similarly, the same method can also be adopted in the southern part of India. This will help to achieve the basic objective of the course i.e., to produce good speakers.

The current programme uses more of what Bell calls a semi- direct method where Hind, Manipuri and English are used to teach a particular grammatical structure of Korean. The advantage of using these languages is that mapping or co-relating Korean with English is not possible. So, it is more effective for the teacher to switch to Hindi or Manipuri and help a student to understand a concept more clearly. For instance, word order of Korean, Manipuri and Hindi are the same, whereas English has a completely different word order viz., subject-verb-object. A lot about a particular language is evident based on the above factors.

### **Some Linguistic Principles Regarding Word Order**

Greenberg suggested around forty-five universal features of human language. For instance:

Universal 3: Languages with dominant verb-subject-object order are always prepositional.

Universal 4: With overwhelmingly greater than chance frequency, languages with normal subject-object-verb order are postpositional.

Greenberg suggested that depending on the ordering of V and O in a language, the placing of other constituents can be predicted. This notion of correlational value was further given a better shape by Lehman (1973, 1978). This implies that if the very basic order of verb and object are known, then certain ordering of other constituents like noun-genitive, adjective-noun, ad-positions can be predicted. Some of Lehman's correlatives are as follows:

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VO

Pre-position+Noun

Noun+Genetive

Noun+Adjective

Noun+Relative clause

Prefixes

OV

Post-positon+Noun

Genetive+Noun

Adjective+Noun

Relative clause+Noun

Suffixes

Generally, languages do not strictly follow these patterns. For instance, English violates the correlation Noun+Genitive as Mary's book is possible as opposed to the predicted order of "book of Mary". Therefore, the correlatives and principles are more like prototypes. The obvious reason behind this is that languages do not conform to the strict constraints. Instead, sometimes languages tend to show ordering of both types. Lehman explains that these inconsistencies occur due to some kind of change that a particular language is going through. However, such an explanation does not give a clear picture as to why correlation pairs occur based on the O and V ordering.

To answer these queries, Vennman (1973,1974, 1976), suggested the idea of head and dependent relation, where a head is usually the central element and the dependent modifies the head or serve as one of the argument. This implies that if the ordering of ad-positions is given then the object-verb ordering can be predicted. This correlation like noun-adjective and relative clause-noun ordering violates the notion of head-dependent relation.

Hawkins (1983) suggested a three-way classification of languages as verb initial, verb medial and verb final to include languages with verbs placed in the initial position of the sentence. He further proposes the cross-category harmony principle, which states that if a language places the dependents (adjective, relative clause and genitive before the head noun, then the verb dependents (object, adverb, negative, auxiliary) will also be placed before the verb. To explain the violation ordering of relative clause-noun in OV languages, Hawkins suggests the heavy constituent principle, where the relative clause is a heavy constituent, owing to the various grammatical categories present in the clause. Thus, the heavy constituent is usually placed after

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the noun they modify. This clearly explains as to why the predicted relative clause+noun relation is changed to noun+relative clause relation. Hawkins' proposal is definitely a broader view and if the principles are applied less rigidly then the inconsistencies can be dealt with properly.

If the trainer is aware of some of the principles, then s/he can understand the problems a student faces while learning L2. For instance, with the help of Universal 4, the trainer will be able to make the learner understand that like Hindi, Korean also have postpositions and contrast the two with English. Keeping in mind these correlations and principles will help the trainer in offering better explanation about the existence of certain differences and similarities between L1 and L2. This might facilitate a thorough retention of L2 with the help of L1 structures.

### **Conclusion**

Using Devnagri script to help the learners of Korean language adjust their articulation to the Korean language sound system has paved the way to capitalize on what is already available to the learner. This has proved to facilitate the initiation into the foreign language faster and orient the learner towards the target language, subsequently. Not only this, constant comparison with Hindi grammatical structures have helped the students understand certain Korean language phenomenon in a better way.

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