

한글 – part 3 (The Korean alphabet)

Today, we close our chapter on the Korean alphabet with the studying of double vowels, double consonants and aspirated consonants.

1) Double vowels

They are called “double” because you need two elements to compose one vowel. They are a combination of the simple vowels that we studied earlier; there are 11 of them and their writing and pronunciation can seem very similar at the beginning so be careful.



The vowels highlighted in the same color have the same pronunciation

애 [ae]	에 [e]
애 [yae]	예 [ye]
외 [wei] as in <i>weight</i>	와 [wa] 왜 [wae]
위 [wee]	워 [weo] 웨 [we]
의 [ui] as in <i>gooey</i>	

연습 (Exercise): Read the following words and decipher them into Latin letters:

-apple:	사과	-pig:	돼지
-chair:	의자	-hospital:	병원
-foreign country:	외국	-movie:	영화
-yesterday:	어제	-trip:	여행
-karaoke:	노래방		

2) Double consonants

Some simple consonants double to create a slightly different sound. They are also named “tensed consonants” as you need to tense your throat when uttering them. There are 5 of them:

ㄱ

ㄱㄱ
[kk]

ㄷ

ㄷㄷ
[dd]

ㅃ

ㅃㅃ
[bb]

ㅅ

ㅅㅅ
[ss]

ㅈ

ㅈㅈ
[jj]

ex: 상 is pronounced
[saang]= prize

ex: 쌍 is pronounced
[ssaang]= pair

Those sounds are usually extremely difficult for foreigners to distinguish and pronounce well, but don't worry, it will come with time and practice! All you have to remember for now is that double consonants usually sound "aggressive" because they are sharp, your throat is tense and in the emphasis, more strength is used to pronounce them.

3) Aspired consonants

Those are called aspired because you need to release air when you pronounce them. There are 4 of them; those letters also derive from the simple consonants that we studied earlier.

ㄱ → ㅋ [k] as in “kid”


ㄷ → ㅌ [t] as in “Tiffany”

ㅃ → ㅍ [p] as in “party”

ㅈ → ㅊ [ch] as in “child”

By now, you might have realized that throughout those lessons we learned 3 types of [k], [d], [b], [s] and [j]. And, if you have listened to their sounds, you might have noticed that you hear no difference (and here starts the struggle for foreigners!) To foreign ears, those sounds are quite similar and extremely hard to differentiate, but they are different, and, if you do not pronounce them properly, you might change the meaning of a word! See after.

↓ 가	↓ 다	↓ 바	↓ 사	↓ 자
카	타	파	-	차
까	따	빠	싸	짜

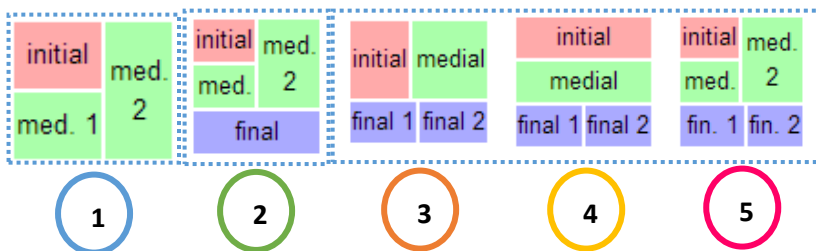
가 카 까 <i>/ka/ /kʰa/ /kʰa/</i>	다 타 따 <i>/ta/ /tʰa/ /tʰa/</i>	자 차 짜 <i>/ja/ /tʰa/ /tʰa/</i>
바 파 빠 <i>/pa/ /pʰa/ /pʰa/</i>	사 싸 <i>/sa/ /sʰa/</i>	

연습 (Exercise): Look at the following words and see how different their meaning is with just one “small” change:

- | | | |
|----------------|------------------|------------------|
| -탈: mask | -딸: daughter | -달: moon |
| -크다: to be big | -끄다: to turn off | |
| -자다: to sleep | -차다: to be cold | -짜다: to be salty |

4) Syllable construction: two medials and/ or two finals

In the previous lesson, we saw how to build a syllable with one initial, one medial and one final letter. Today, we are going to see that you can also form syllables with two medials and/or two finals → You will find below the different possibilities of the writing of a syllable and their examples in colour; each colour representing a different position (NB: #5 is rather rare).



귀 (ear) 병원 (hospital) 밖 (outside)

떡볶이 (tteokbokki) 광