

# Korean Pronunciation © 2014<sup>3</sup> Luciano Canepari

19.47. *Korean* (Altaic). The *traditional neutral* accent may have a length opposition for its vowels (but only on the very first –or only– syllable of words, and not distinguished in writing), realized as more or less narrow diphthongs, as, for instance: *mal* [ˈmal] ‘horse’, *mal* [ˈmaal] ‘speech’. However, in the *modern neutral* accent (and in the *mediatic* accent, too) this very limited length opposition is no longer distinctive. In fact, such lengthenings can freely occur, sometimes for expressive reasons, with no actual meaning value at all, nowadays. We show three vocograms: one for each accent.

Thus, modern Korean has 10 phonemically short V, while traditional Korean has 10 both short and long V. Regionally, /e, ε/ can merge into [ɛ] (or [ɛ̃], in the mediatic accent). So, mediatic Korean has just 7 ‘short’ V, as the central rounded phonemes, /ʉ, ɔ/, are, generally, substituted with /wi, we/, as shown in the vocogram. The phoneme /ʌ/ varies a lot, as can be seen from the vocograms: traditional [ʌ], modern [ʌ, ↓ɔ̃], mediatic [ə(ɔ)].

In this updated version, we add two vocograms, for *Seoul*, with seven vowel phonemes, and for the broad South-eastern accent, *Daegu*, with just six vowels.

In addition, there are 6 /jV/ sequences: /je, jε, ja, jʌ, jo, ju/ [j-]; and 4 /wV/ sequences /we, wε, wa, wʌ/ [w-]. The diphthong /wi/ is very peculiar, because it generally corresponds to traditional [wi] (sometimes [wĩ]), modern [ɰi(i)] ‘/ɰi/’, and mediatic [ĩ(ɪ)] ‘/ĩ/’.

In this new presentation of the phonemic structure of Korean (instead of a more abstract one, although apparently more ‘economical’, as before), we prefer to show a more ‘natural’ one, with three series of stop (and a stopstrictive) C. Thus, we have a ‘plain’ series /p, t, k; t͡ʃ/, together with a sequential ‘aspirated’ series, /ph, th, kh; t͡ʃh/, and a further sequential ‘glottalized’ series, /pʔ, tʔ, kʔ; t͡ʃʔ/. Before /j/ or front V, /k/ is prevelar [k̟].

The plain series is realized as voiced, in voiced contexts: [b, d, g; d͡ʒ] (but as half-voiced in a slower, or more careful, speech style, [b̚, d̚, ɡ̚; d͡ʒ̚]). On the contrary, the whole series is realized as lenis voiceless word-initially, [#p̚, #t̚, #k̚; #t͡ʃ̚] (possibly even with ‘voiced aspiration’, [#p̚h̚, #t̚h̚, #k̚h̚; #t͡ʃ̚h̚]). In the mediatic accent, /t͡ʃ/ has rather a prepalatal articulation [t͡ʃ̟], with all necessary taxophones.

The ‘aspirated’ sequences, /ph, th, kh; t͡ʃh/, are realized as ‘aspirated’ voiceless, [ph, th, kh; t͡ʃh̚], with their ‘aspiration’ having a *palatal* color before /i, j/, [p̚h̚, t̚h̚, k̚h̚; t͡ʃ̚h̚], a *velar rounded* color before /u, w/, [p̚h̚, t̚h̚, k̚h̚; t͡ʃ̚h̚], and a *velar* one before /ʉ/ (or, in slower or more careful speech, in the previous cases, too), [p̚h̚, t̚h̚, k̚h̚; t͡ʃ̚h̚]. The same holds for /h/ in the same contexts, eg *him* /ˈhim/ [h̚im], *him* /ˈh̚um/ [h̚um], *huchu* /huˈt͡ʃhu/ [huˈt͡ʃ̚hu]; in voiced contexts, /h/ is [h̚] (or [∅]).

The glottalized sequences /pʔ, tʔ, kʔ; t͡ʃʔ/ are realized either with simultaneous glottalization and lengthening, [p̚ː, t̚ː, k̚ː; t͡ʃ̚ː], or with the laryngealization of subsequent vocalic elements ([V̚], including possible voiced C).

/s/ [s] becomes [z̚] between V or between N and V; we also have the glottalized phonemic sequence, /sʔ/, which is realized as [s̚ː] (or, if word-initial, as [#sh̚]) + [V̚]. Before /i/ (and for /sʔj/, as well), we have [s̚ː] (or [#sh̚]) + [V̚].

The phoneme /l/ has the following taxophones [rV, ʔV, lV], [li, lj]; [[C, lC, lC];



[l<sup>#</sup>, l<sup>#</sup>]. Also [ɲi, ɲj]. As a rule, final C are inaudibly released: [C] (including sonants, generally).

A few examples follow (in round brackets we give some transliteration variants which are frequently found, as usual, with the only result to complicate interpretations and descriptions): *pul* (*bul*) /'pul/ [ˈpʌl; ˈpʰʌl] 'fire', *p'ul* (*phul*) /'phul/ [ˈpʰʌl] 'grass', *ppul* (*pul*) /'pɯl/ [ˈpɯl] 'horn'; *ipul* (*ibul*) /i'pul/ [iˈbʌl; iˈbʌl] 'this fire', *ip'ul* (*iphul*) /i'phul/ [iˈpʰʌl] 'this grass', *ippul* (*ipul*) /i'pɯl/ [iˈpɯl] 'this horn'.