

COMPARISON OF KOREAN, SLOVAK AND CZECH PHONOLOGICAL SYSTEMS FROM THE EDUCATIONAL POINT OF VIEW

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The aim of the article is to provide a basic comparison of the Korean with the Slovak and Czech phonological systems from the educational point of view and identify possible problems that the Korean students of Slovak and Czech languages may be confronted with while learning the correct pronunciation of their sounds. It is stated that the absence of certain Slovak and Czech phonemes in Korean phonological system is only of little difficulty for students. More problematic is the case of several independent phonemes in Slovak and Czech which are only phonological variants in Korean and their realization is positionally dependent. There are also difficulties arising from the different character and function of word stress in these three languages.

Korean studies in former Czechoslovakia have been conducted systematically since the Second World War and have produced considerable results. At the Faculty of Arts at Charles University in Prague the study of Korean language was first introduced in 1950. Since then, many students have had the opportunity to study the Korean language, literature, philosophy and history.

The introduction of the Czech and Slovak languages and literatures together with other Central and East European studies to Korea began just a few years ago. One of its main reasons may have been the globalization process which has been present in Korean society for the last few years. The Department of Czech was established at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies in March 1988. In 1993 it was complemented by the Slovak language and the name of the department was changed to Department of Czech and Slovak Studies. Every year forty students start study in the first grade.

Already in the beginning of their study they come across the first difficulties arising from the differences between the Czech and Slovak languages on one hand and their mother tongue on the other. These languages are different from the point of view of both typological as well as genealogical classification. The differences can be found on all levels of the language system. Since a detailed

comparative analysis of the three languages would require much greater space we decided to concentrate our attention only on the sound level of the language system. We also refrain from a detailed theoretical study of all, even the slightest differences. The aim of our article is to look at the vocalic and consonantal system of these languages from the educational point of view and identify possible problems that the Korean students of the Czech and Slovak languages may be confronted with while learning the correct pronunciation of their sounds.

Although we will base our comparison on the inventory of phonemes in these three languages, it will be most of all their phonetic realization that we will be interested in. Due to this, we divided especially the consonantal part into sections based more on phonetic than phonological criteria. Moreover, we used combination of various phonetic criteria in order to get specific groups of consonants. As a basis we take Standard Korean, Slovak and Czech.

1. VOCALIC SYSTEM

1.1. Monophthongs

Generally speaking, the Korean vocalic system is much richer than both the Slovak and Czech vocalic systems. This can be an advantage for Korean students who actually have only to narrow the inventory of vocalic sounds which they use in Korean. Due to the aim of this article as well as to what we mentioned above we will refrain from the classification of Slovak short vowels as neutral while the Czech vowels are open in comparison to cardinal vowels (on this topic see Hála 1962 and Wodarz 1970). Standard Slovak and Czech have identical phonemes *a, e, i, o, u, á, é, í, ó, ú*. In Slovak the *a* [ae] vowel is pronounced only in so-called high style. In the neutral style of Standard Slovak it corresponds to *e* [e]. In Korean there are 10 short monophthongs: *a, e, i, o, u, ä, ə, ɔ, ü, ö*. Although the quantity of vowels does exist in Korean, it is not as important as in Slovak and Czech and it has the ability to differentiate the meaning, only to a limited extent, e.g. the meaning of 'eye' /nun/ from 'snow' /nu:n/ (see Kwon – Bytel 1996). The quantity of the vowel is not graphically marked in writing. In Slovak and Czech the quantity has a full phonological-distinctive function enabling differentiation of the meaning and is always explicitly marked in writing. Since the Slovak and Czech short monophthongs *a, e, i, o, u* roughly correspond to their Korean counterparts and since besides the difference in length there is no difference in quality between a short and long *a, e, i, o, u* it seems, that the Korean students should acquire the pronunciation of all Slovak and Czech monophthongs without greater effort. This has been confirmed by our everyday experience.

1.2. Diphthongs

As with the monophthongs, there are more diphthongs in Korean than in Slovak and Czech. In Slovak, there are four rising (*ia, ie, iu, ô*) diphthongs. In Czech, there are three falling diphthongs, namely *au, ou, eu*. In Korean, there are eleven diphthongs: *ia, ie, iu, io, iɔ, iä, əi, uɔ, ua, uä, ue*. Again, the students

usually do not have bigger problems when learning the proper pronunciation of Slovak and Czech diphthongs.

2. CONSONANTAL SYSTEM

In contrast to the vocalic system, there are fewer consonants in Korean than in the Slovak and Czech languages. As in the previous section, we will not go into the details discussing all possible phonetic realizations of certain phonemes (e.g. different allophones of Slovak *m* and *n*), neither their phonematic character (on phonological character of *dz*, *dž*, *g* in Czech see Pauliny 1974).

2.1. Sonorants

2.1.1. Nasals

In Slovak and Czech, there are three nasal phonemes: *m*, *n*, *ň*. Their phonetic realization includes besides the main variants *m*, *n*, *ň* and also a velar *ŋ*. Being just an allophone in these two languages, it is an independent phoneme in Korean. The similar quality of Korean and Slovak and Czech *m*, *n*, and *ŋ* sounds secures their rather problemless articulation. Besides its nonexistence as an independent phoneme in Korean, the rather problematic character of *ň* is enhanced by the fact that its “soft” or palatalized pronunciation (in comparison to *n*) is in writing sometimes determined by the *i*, *í*, *e* and *ě* which it precedes. Although not having any single equivalent in the Korean graphic system, once acquired by a student it represents no big difficulties.

2.1.2. Liquids

In both languages, there are *r* and *l* phonemes which can also form a core of a syllable instead of a vowel. Besides that, in Slovak there are also long phonemes *ř* and *ĺ* and in Czech there is the *ř* phoneme. In contrast to all these phonemes, there is just one phoneme with two positional variants in Korean. And it is exactly this positional dependence of *r* and *l* variants that causes problems to Korean students while learning Slovak and Czech. As with the situation of *ň* that we have mentioned earlier, there is the *l* phoneme in Slovak which does not have any counterpart in the Korean phonological system nor is it represented by a special sign or combination of signs. Still, once having acquired it, the students can pronounce and use it on a satisfactory level.

2.1.3. J

This Slovak and Czech phoneme does not exist in the Korean phonological system but this does not imply any extraordinary problems which the students have with its acquisition. The students know very similar sound to the phonetic realization of *j* since although it does not occur independently in Korean, it exists as the first semivocalic part of several Korean diphthongs. Moreover, there is a similar semivowel *ř* in Slovak pronounced in Slovak diphthongs *ia*, *ie*, *iu* as well as instead of *j* when this occupies a final position in a syllable.

2.2. Plosives

Standard Slovak and Czech share the following phonemes: *p, b, t, d, t', d', k, g*. These phonemes create pairs in which the two phonemes differ only in the presence or absence of a distinctive feature of voice. In Korean, the distinctive feature of voice is not important. Due to this, the pairs of phonemes are reduced to single voiceless Korean phonemes *p, t, k* with voiced variants *b, d, g*. Their pronunciation is usually positionally dependent. This often results in problems with proper distinguishing and following pronunciation of corresponding consonants.

In Korean there is a group of intensive consonants which are always “voiceless” and in writing they are represented by double graphemes: *pp, tt, kk, čč, ss*. Another group which has no counterpart either in Slovak or Czech is the group of aspirated *p', t', k', č', s'* consonants. However, there is almost no influence of these consonants on the pronunciation of Slovak and Czech words.

There are no *t'* and *d'* phonemes in Korean phonological system, neither are they represented by a special sign or combination of signs. Like with the *ň* and *l'* phonemes, the Korean students do not have problems to pronounce them once they learned the correct pronunciation. It is a bigger problem for them to identify these phonemes and their “soft” or palatalized character (in comparison to *t* and *d*) in writing when this is not shown by the diacritical mark “ ˇ ” but only by the *i, í, e* or *ě* which immediately follow it.

2.3. Affricates and Fricatives

Neither following Slovak and Czech phonemes, nor their phonetic representations exist in Standard Korean: *c, dz, z, ž*. Still, their absence in the students mother tongue does not cause any difficulty and their acquisition by students is usually quite rapid. Although there is no *š* phoneme either, the *š* sound occurs in Korean when *s* is followed by a *i* vowel or by some diphthongs. Again, due to its positional dependence in Korean, the interference usually plays an important role here, making the students mispronounce all Slovak and Czech combinations of *si* and *ši*. This needs lots of practice and pronunciation exercises.

Slovak and Czech *v* and *f* phonemes form a minimal pair with a phonological distinction of voice. In Korean they are not independent phonemes.

In comparison to the independent phonological status of Slovak and Czech *č* and *dž* phonemes, these represent in Korean just one phoneme with two variants, the phonetic realization (voiced/voiceless) of which depends on the position in a syllable or word.

Due to its presence in the Korean phonological system, the *h* phoneme and its phonetic realization usually does not cause any problems, although in Korean (in contrast to Slovak and Czech) its realization is usually voiceless either as a laryngeal *h* or velar *ch*. Only sometimes when it occurs between two vowels it may become voiced. In several cases it is not realized in pronunciation. The proximity of Slovak and Czech *ch* phoneme secures its relatively easy acquisition by Korean students in spite of the absence of a special sign for graphical representation of *ch* in the Korean alphabet.

3. WORD STRESS

To make the picture complete, it is necessary to mention the problem of word stress which the Korean students encounter. In both the Slovak and Czech languages the main stress is always on the first syllable which means it does not have a phonological-distinctive function (as in languages where its position is free) but rather phonological-delimitative function signalling the first syllable of a word and through this the probable word boundaries. The Korean stress is a melodic one. The difference between the nature of these two kinds of stress causes many problems to Korean students.

CONCLUSIONS

1. While the Korean vocalic system is richer than both the Slovak and Czech, the situation with corresponding consonantal system is just opposite. This has certain effects that influence the educational process.

2. Due to the richer vocalic system of their language, the Korean students studying the Slovak and Czech languages usually have no problems to learn and acquire a proper articulation of Slovak and Czech vowels.

3. Several Slovak and Czech consonantal phonemes do not exist in Korea, e.g. *ř, d', ň, l, f, v, ř, z, ž, c, dz*. In spite of this absence, the Korean students can usually acquire them quite rapidly. They also use them without having any major problems with the exception of *ř, d', ň* and *l* when their palatalized articulation is not marked in Slovak and Czech by a diacritical mark but is signalled by following *i, e, í* or *ě*.

4. In contrast to Slovak and Czech, the phonological distinctive feature of voice does not play an important role in the Korean phonological system. Due to this, in comparison to Slovak and Czech voiced and voiceless pairs of phonemes *p, b, t, d, k, g, č, dž* there are just single voiceless consonants *p, t, k, č* with voiced variants *b, d, g* and *dž*. It is this positional dependence from the Korean language that often interferes with their proper realization in Slovak and Czech and thus makes it difficult for Korean students to pronounce them.

5. In both Slovak and Czech *s* and *š* are two independent phonemes with their corresponding phonetic realization. In Korean, there is just *s* phoneme although on the phonetic level the *š* sound also exists. It is mostly when *s* is followed by *i* or some diphthongs. Again, because of its exclusively positional dependence in Korean, the interference usually plays an important role here, making students mispronounce the Slovak and Czech combinations of *si* and *ši*.

6. The Korean students usually have no problems with acquisition and correct pronunciation of Slovak and Czech *m, n* and *ň* phonemes. The same is also true with the velar *ŋ* which being just an allophone in Slovak and Czech is an independent phoneme in Korean. We mentioned the problems concerning the palatalized articulation of *ň* when not explicitly marked, in the third paragraph.

7. In comparison to the group of Slovak and Czech liquids *r*, *l*, *ř*, *ḷ*, *ř*, *l'* there is just one phoneme with two (*r* and *l*) positional variants, the pronunciation of which depends on their position in the syllable. As with the *s/š* situation that we mentioned above, the correct use and pronunciation of either *r* or *l* is difficult for Korean students and requires lots of effort.

8. In Slovak and Czech, the word stress is fixed on the first syllable and it has the phonological-delimitative function signalling the word boundaries. In Korean, the stress is melodic. The different character of these two frequently results in mispronunciation of Slovak and Czech words and needs special attention from the students.

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