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Hangul - The Korean Language

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Recommended Citation

Stewart, Jennifer, "Hangul - The Korean Language" (2009). *2009-10 Postcards*. Article. Submission 12.
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Journals from South Korea 2009

2009-08-31 Spring, 2009: Hangul - The Korean Language

One of my major goals in coming to Korea was to learn the language. I'm Korean, and throughout my life, while I have learned a little, I've always felt that to fully appreciate my heritage, I need to become more proficient in my mother's native language.

Needless to say, the Korean language class at Yonsei University was the first on my list of classes that I wanted to register for. I decided to start at level 1, even with my small background of Korean, because I wanted to make sure I had the grammatical rules down before moving onto more challenging aspects of learning the language.

I must say: learning Korean while in Korea is the best way to do it. Every day I'm being forced to push myself to remember new vocabulary, use new sentences, and become more fluent in my accent and pronunciation. I absolutely love it.

It also helps that my Korean class is amazing. I'm in class 1-A, and my teacher Lee Sun-sang-nim (Sun-sang-nim means teacher in Korean) constantly pushes me to expand my conversational skills. My classmates are also quite supportive, and as a class, we all have become very close. Most of us actually hang out outside of class time, as well as study together. We've also had a couple of dinners where we try to get as many of us together, which is difficult because of our busy schedules. Having such a supportive classroom atmosphere has been wonderful in helping my Korean, because I'm not afraid to try speaking and experimenting with what I know of the language.

When I try to speak Korean out in the city, about 99% of the time, the reaction is positive. Most Koreans love it when I speak Korean to them, especially as they know it isn't such a popular language to learn outside of Korea—they have such strong national pride, that when they hear a foreigner speak Korean, they will almost immediately take a liking to you! I've only had one partially negative experience when speaking Korean, since I am Korean, some elderly Koreans think that it's a shame that I don't know the language fluently. Once I got chided when riding the bus because I admitted to not learning Korean completely when I was younger. At the same time, the elder Koreans weren't necessarily blaming me—they mostly talked to me about how it was a shame that my parents didn't force me to learn Korean at a young age, but I should keep studying.

Overall, I love how the Korean language is constructed and sounds. The alphabet is very simple, and learning how to read it takes maybe a couple of hours (max). Grammatically, though, Korean is very different from English. It's a challenge, but I love it!

One of the best compliments that I get though, is when my accent (which is, admittedly, quite good) makes some Koreans think that I am fluent enough to hold more complex conversations. It shows me I'm on the right track!

Until next time,

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