Main difficulties for Hungarian-learning Korean students and effective Hungarian teaching methods

Jinil Yoo*

Department of Hungarian, Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, Yongin-si 449-791, Republic of Korea

Abstract

Indeed, views vary from scholar to scholar, but according to a generally accepted theory, Korean and Hungarian are known to belong to the Altaic and Finn-Ugor language families, respectively. Originating in the Ural and Altaic Mountains, the two languages are close to each other in terms of language family as well as language type (agglutinative language). Thanks to these similarities, Korean students are seen to learn Hungarian easily, compared to other Middle Eastern European languages, i.e. Slavic and Romance languages. In spite of such advantage, there is a typical interlanguage Korean students often use ungrammatically, when learning Hungarian. This paper aims to look into the typical interlanguage and determine the reasons for its birth on the basis of the data I have accumulated, while teaching Korean students Hungarian for 12 years and the survey for 136 Korean students (34: freshman) at the Department of Hungarian Language of Hankuk University of Foreign Studies. The representative interlanguage forms are most found in phonetics / phonology, morphology and syntax. In the area of phonetics / phonology, Korean students have difficulty in clearly distinguishing between long and short vowels, e.g. a-á, e-é, i-í, o-ó, ö-ő, u-ú, ü-ű, and some consonants, i.e. d, dz, dzs, gyé, zé, zsé. In addition, few Korean students correctly tell vowel i from consonant j. In the area of morphology, the conjugation by person causes the most serious trouble to Korean students. Korean does not conjugate verbs by person instead of omitting subjects, whereas Hungarian conjugates verbs by person instead of often omitting subjects. The postpositions widely used in Hungarian are also headaches to Korean students. In the area of syntax, an interlanguage often appears in word order. Korean has a fixed word order, whereas Hungarian gives a speaker a freedom to change a word order according to his/her intention. In conclusion, I show effective teaching methods, which I am using on these difficulties to Korean students learning Hungarian.

Keywords: Hungarian; Finn-Ugor language; phonetics; morphology; syntax; Korean students; effective teaching methods

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +82-31-330-4922
E-mail address: yoojinil@hufs.ac.kr
1. Introduction

Both Korean and Hungarian are known to originate in the Uralic language family. It is accepted without great difference that Korean belongs to the Ural-Altaic language family, but there were many different views on the origin of Hungarian for a time (Kim Seung-gon, 1984). But paying attention to the language similarities between Lapps on the northern part of the Scandinavian Peninsula and Hungarians, János Sajnovics began to perform a study of the relationships between Hungarian and Lappish in 1768, which led to the historically first publication of a paper on “the relationships between the two languages” in 1770. Based on this paper, linguistic studies were carried out for 150 years, which made it possible to determine the relationships among Hungarian, Finnish, Estonian and languages of minorities spread in the former Soviet Union territory and to establish the concept of the Finno-Ugrian or Uralic language family (Lee sang-hyup, 1996). Thus, both Korean and Hungarian are said to derive from the Uralic region and to belong to agglutinative languages. But despite of such resemblances, I have found Korean students having plenty of difficulties in learning Hungarian contrary to expectations over the last 13 years. Based on my 13-year experiences at Korean universities, the present presentation will look into the matters Korean students found the most difficult in learning Hungarian and put forward my effective teaching methods used to help students overcome the challenges. I believe my teaching methods will serve as a supplementary data in teaching other languages as well.

2. Main Difficulties for Hungarian-Learning Korean Students

In his recent presentation, Prof. Sándor Kovács, who has taught Korean students Hungarian for ten years, put forward several points in which Korean students have difficulties in learning the language: the distinction between long and short vowels in terms of phonetics, the proper use of definite and indefinite articles in terms of morphology, and the composition of Hungarian sentences in accordance with Hungarian word orders in terms of syntax (Sándor Kovács, 2014). I have also investigated a typical interlanguage of Hungarian-learning Korean students in terms of phonetics, morphology and syntax (Yoo Jinil, 2013). In this chapter, I will introduce the matters Hungarian-learning Korean students find the most difficult in each area on the basis of the both data and my 13 years of teaching experiences.

In the area of phonetics, students have difficulties pronouncing short and long vowels. While Korean requires no great differentiation between them, Hungarian requires a clear distinction between them, since they are different phonemes. However, as pointed out by Sándor Kovács, Korean students tend to pronounce most Hungarian long vowels short. For example, they pronounce long vowels í, ű, õ, ó as short ones i, ü, õ, o. The Korean vowel system has no é, a vowel which has characteristics of palatal consonant, flat labial, long sound and low sound (Park Soo-young, 2002), so most Korean students pronounce é as i which is similar to é and has characteristics of palatal consonant, flat labial, short sound and high sound. There is none of Hungarian round vowels Ő, Ő, õ and ű in Korean, so they are apt to pronounce them incorrectly. Among Hungarian consonants, voiced consonants cause Korean students great inconveniences. While the Korean consonant system has no voiced sound, voiced and voiceless sounds are coupled with one another in the Hungarian consonant system, so most Korean students pronounce Hungarian voiced sounds as voiceless ones. It is often hard for Hungarian native speakers to follow the consonant pronunciation of Korean students. Hungarian and Korean consonants number 25 and 19, respectively. This means that the Hungarian consonant system is more complicated and subdivided, which makes Korean students hard to pronounce several Hungarian consonants accurately. Dzs, z, zs, and gy are such representative examples. They are different phonemes in the Hungarian consonant system, but all the same ones in the Korean consonant system. Judging from my experiences, it is almost impossible for Korean students to pronounce them correctly.

In the area of morphology, the conjugation by person gives the most serious trouble to Korean students. In Korean sentences, their subjects are scarcely omitted, but their verbs are the same in form. On the contrary, Hungarian sentences have their subjects often omitted and their verbs changed in accordance with person, time (past, present and future) and mood (imperative, conditional etc.), and so on. In terms of verb conjugation, Hungarian is more complicated than Korean, which demands much time and effort to conjugate Hungarian verbs correctly. Besides, articles are scarcely used in Korean, whereas definite and indefinite articles are differentiated from one another strictly in Hungarian. This drives Korean students into much embarrassment.
In terms of syntax, Korean students find the greatest difficulty in using the correct word orders of Hungarian. Word orders are defined grammatically in Korean, while they can vary, depending on the wishes of speakers in Hungarian. For instance, a sentence of the third form is always composed in order of subject (S) + object (O) + predicate (P) in Korean. However, things are different in Hungarian: if no specific vocabulary is emphasized, a sentence is composed in order of S + P + O, but for example if O is emphasized, it is composed in order of S + O + P. In Hungarian, a sentence generally employs an order of S + P + O + other components, but if a specific vocabulary is emphasized, it is placed before a verb. Like this, Hungarian word orders are very variable. Therefore, it causes difficulties to Korean students accustomed to fixed word orders.

3. Effective Teaching Methods and Conclusion

This chapter will introduce the teaching methods I have used for my Hungarian-learning Korean students to remove the above-mentioned mistakes and difficulties found in the students. I believe these methods will serve as a supplementary data in teaching other languages as well.

In the area of phonetics, I kept my students from pronouncing long vowels as short ones by letting them pronounce long ones excessively long when reading Hungarian-language texts. In principle, long vowels take about twice the time than short ones, but I let my students pronounce the former three times as long as the latter. This exercise made it possible for students to pronounce long vowels as long as Hungarians when talking with them. In addition, I refrained my students from pronouncing voiced sounds as voiceless ones by repeatedly letting them exercise the pronunciation of voiced ones to such that Adam's apple trembles. The exercise was somewhat effective in the pronunciation of voiced vowels. Further, I helped my students pronounce Hungarian vowel é and consonants dzs, z, zs and gy by making a consonant and vowel articulation table by method and location and letting students pronounce consonants and vowels pursuant to the table. As a consequence, I saw my students improving their pronunciation, though it was not as perfect as that of Hungarian native speakers.

In the area of morphology, I helped my students to master the complicated conjugation of Hungarian verbs by letting them make a person change table by time and mood with corresponding examples: the 1st/2nd verb conjugations of the present, the past and the conditional mood and the imperative mood. I let them read the table aloud repeatedly every day. The result was that they could conjugate Hungarian verbs relatively correctly without stress. Indeed, I have not yet created my own teaching method on the correct use of articles, but let my students repeatedly exercise the examples with definite and indefinite articles and without any article.

In the area of syntax, I helped my students get accustomed to Hungarian word orders by making typical forms of Hungarian sentences. They are as follows:

1. Subject + Intransitive Verb
2. Subject + Intransitive Verb + Adverbial phrase
3. Subject + Transitive Verb + Object
4. Subject + Transitive Verb + Object + Adverbial phrase

I roughly divided Hungarian sentences into those with and without emphasized specific vocabulary. I enabled my students to identify how nuances change according to the location of an emphasized specific vocabulary by letting them repeatedly exercise the corresponding sentences.

My teaching methods may also have the parts inapplicable to teachers and students. Nonetheless, I have acquired the methods by my 13 years of teaching activities and have found that they are very helpful for teaching students the parts they find most difficult.

References