Written–Spoken Knowledge for L2 Learners to Read Korean*

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Abstract

The written form of a language has been recognized a subsidiary to its spoken form. However, there are many discrepancies between the two forms of a language. This can confuse L2 learners of Korean in reading Korean. The purpose of this study was to investigate the phonological hierarchies corresponding to morphological hierarchies in the modern Korean. The findings of this study were as follows. (1) Utterances are identical with sentences which have the intonation. (2) An intonational phrase consists of one accentual phrase or more. This shows the speaker’s attitudes and emotions. (3) Accentual phrase consists of one phonological word or more. This influences the phonological phenomena and interpretation of the phrase. (4) A phonological word is made up of one morpheme or more. This is marked by potential pause, divisibility, and indivisibility. (4) A speech syllable is composed of phonemes. (5) A phoneme is the smallest unit of spoken language. Although this study did not fully explain the differences between written and spoken language, this study probably helps L2 learners of Korean to read Korean effectively.

Key words : Phonological Hierarchies, Utterance, Intonational Phrase, Accentual Phrase, Phonological Word, Speech Syllable, Phoneme

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1. Introduction

Literacy could be generally understood as the ability to read and write. Literacy begins with the ability to understand written and spoken words. Especially, reading is a complex cognitive process of decoding written texts for the purpose of comprehending their meanings. In the process of reading, readers use a variety of reading strategies to transform written texts into sounds, and then identify their meanings. However, Korean pronunciations from written texts are very confusing and complicated. Although the Korean writing system is a phonemic system, the one-to-one correspondence, the one grapheme to one phoneme is ideal. In fact, the correspondence between graphemes and phonemes does not actually exist.

However, it has been generally acknowledged that the written form of a language is a subsidiary to its spoken form. Especially, the mainstream of linguistics has long relegated writing to a mere substitute of speech under the influence of Saussure and Chomsky. Saussure (1959:23-24) states “language and writing are two distinct systems of signs; the second exists for the sole purpose of representing the first. The linguistic object is not both the written and the spoken forms of words; the spoken forms alone constitute the object.” In addition, Chomsky and Halle (1968:3) spoke out that the grammar of the language is the system of rules that specify the sound-meaning correspondence.

On the basis of this research background, numerous studies have attempted to find and explore the rules which define phonetic variations. In Korean education for reading, numerous studies have focused on the phonological rules which mainly apply to reading words in Korean