



## Korean Ladder Study Note

# ㅏ

## The Vowels English Speakers Mix Up

Level	Topic	Focus
A1 · Beginner TOPIK 1	Pronunciation Vowels	ㅏ The Vowels English Speakers Mix Up

### Study Links

[Open this lesson on Korean Ladder](https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-A1-PRON-VOW-001)

<https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-A1-PRON-VOW-001>

[Watch the full video on YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zDPHSO7ZO7c)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zDPHSO7ZO7c>

[Visit Korean Ladder for all free lessons](https://www.koreanladder.com)

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### Core Idea

Okay, real question — why does my 서 always come out sounding like 소?

Right? To my English ear they're basically the same 'oh' sound.

그건 아주 흔한 실수예요. That's a very common mix-up, and today it ends.

비밀은 입술이에요. The secret is your lips. ㅏ는 입술에 힘을 빼요 — for ㅏ, take the tension out of your lips.

### Conversation Snapshot

Speaker	Korean	Meaning
Junho	거기 소 있어요? —	Is there a cow over there?
Hana	네, 거기 소가 있어요. —	Yes, there's a cow over there.
Junho	고기 말고 소요? —	A cow, not meat?



Speaker	Korean	Meaning
Hana	네, 진짜 소예요. —	Yes, a real cow.

## Vocabulary & Useful Expressions

Word	Meaning	Example
ㄷ eo	lips relaxed, unrounded	비밀은 입술이에요. The secret is your lips. ㄷ는 입술에 힘을 빼요 — for ㄷ, take the tension out of your lips.
ㅊ o	lips rounded, pushed forward	그리고 ㅊ는 입술을 둥글게 해요 — for ㅊ, round your lips into a small circle.
서 · 소 seo · so	The Vowels English Speakers Mix Up	들어 보세요. 서 — as in 서다, 'to stand'. 소 — 'a cow'. Same consonant, different lips.
소 so	The Vowels English Speakers Mix Up	소는 입술을 둥글게 — 소. 서는 입술에 힘을 빼고 — 서. 느낌이 다르죠?
ㅅ + ㅈ / ㅅ + ㅊ —	same start, different vowel	So it's not the consonant at all — it's literally what my mouth does after it.
입술이 둥글면 오, 입술에 힘을 빼면 어 ipsuri dunggeulmyeon o, ipsure himeul ppaemyeon eo	round lips → ㅊ; relaxed lips → ㄷ	기억하기 쉬워요. 입술이 둥글면 오, 입술에 힘을 빼면 어. Round lips, ㅊ. Loose lips, ㄷ.
머리 meori	head / hair	또 들어 보세요. 머리는 'head' 또는 'hair'예요. 모리는 단어가 아니지만, 소리를 비교해 봐요.
머리 ↔ 모리 meori ↔ mori	The Vowels English Speakers Mix Up	입술을 둥글게 하면 머리가 모리로 바뀌어요. Round the lips and the meaning disappears.



# Grammar / Structure Notes

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ㅏ — lips relaxed, unrounded

입술에 힘을 빼요 — let the lips go slack

ㅜ

ㅜ — lips rounded, pushed forward

입술을 둥글게 해요 — make a small round shape

ㅏ + ㅏ / ㅏ + ㅜ

ㅏ + ㅏ / ㅏ + ㅜ — same start, different vowel

the vowel is doing all the work

## 입술이 둥글면 오, 입술에 힘을 빼면 어

입술이 둥글면 오, 입술에 힘을 빼면 어 — round lips → ㅜ; relaxed lips → ㅏ

기억하기 쉬워요. 입술이 둥글면 오, 입술에 힘을 빼면 어. Round lips, ㅜ. Loose lips, ㅏ.

## 머리

머리 — head / hair

또 들어 보세요. 머리는 'head' 또는 'hair'예요. 모리는 단어가 아니지만, 소리를 비교해 봐요.

# Pronunciation Loop

Phrase	How to practice
서, 소	seo · so
소	so
머리	meori ↔ mori
거기	geogi · gogi
서	seo
커피	keopi

# Self-Check

- 1 Say ㅏ three times: slow, natural, then inside a short sentence.
- 2 Write one original sentence that was not in the video.
- 3 Rewatch the YouTube lesson and pause when the same pattern appears.



## Related / Subsequent Studies

Lesson	Why study it next	Link
ㅈ The Vowels That Now Sound the Same	A1 Pronunciation: compare ㅈ with this lesson so the boundary becomes clearer.	Open lesson <a href="https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-A1-PRON-VOW-002">https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-A1-PRON-VOW-002</a>
ㅑ / ㅓ / ㅕ / ㅗ The 'Y' Glide Vowels	A1 Pronunciation: compare ㅑ / ㅓ / ㅕ / ㅗ with this lesson so the boundary becomes clearer.	Open lesson <a href="https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-A1-PRON-VOW-004">https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-A1-PRON-VOW-004</a>
ㅛ / ㅜ / ㅡ Korea's Tricky Compound Vowels	A1 Pronunciation: compare ㅛ / ㅜ / ㅡ with this lesson so the boundary becomes clearer.	Open lesson <a href="https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-A1-PRON-VOW-003">https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-A1-PRON-VOW-003</a>
ㅋ ㅌ ㅍ Aspirated and Tense Consonants	A1 Pronunciation: compare ㅋ ㅌ ㅍ with this lesson so the boundary becomes clearer.	Open lesson <a href="https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-A1-PRON-CNS-001">https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-A1-PRON-CNS-001</a>

## My Notes

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Free Korean lessons, one rung at a time. This PDF, the website, and the video lessons are free for personal study.