



Korean Ladder Study Note

ㅏ

The Vowels That Now Sound the Same

Level	Topic	Focus
A1 · Beginner TOPIK 1	Pronunciation Vowels	ㅏ The Vowels That Now Sound the Same

Study Links

[Open this lesson on Korean Ladder](https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-A1-PRON-VOW-002)

<https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-A1-PRON-VOW-002>

[Watch the full video on YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rHN-VuMitA4)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rHN-VuMitA4>

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

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Core Idea

여기 질문이 하나 있어요. Korean has two different vowels, ㅏ and ㅑ — so why do they sound exactly the same?

Honestly, I've stared at 개 and 게 and given up — they sound identical to me.

좋은 질문이에요. The pattern today is simple. In modern Seoul Korean, ㅏ and ㅑ have merged into one sound, but the spelling still tells two words apart.

이게 왜 중요할까요. You don't need to force a difference you can't hear. You just need to learn which spelling belongs to which word.

Conversation Snapshot

Speaker	Korean	Meaning
Hana	이거 봐요. 개하고 게. —	Look at this — dog and crab.
Junho	발음이 똑같죠? —	The pronunciation is the same, right?



Speaker	Korean	Meaning
Hana	맞아요. 소리는 같지만 글자는 달라요. —	Right. The sound is the same, but the letters differ.
Junho	그래서 문맥으로 알아요. —	So we know it by context.

Vocabulary & Useful Expressions

Word	Meaning	Example
ㅏ = ㅑ ae = e	Same sound in modern speech	좋은 질문이에요. The pattern today is simple. In modern Seoul Korean, ㅏ and ㅑ have merged into one sound, but the spelling still tells two words apart.
소리 같음, 철자 다름 sori gateum, cheolja dareum	Same sound, different spelling	이게 왜 중요할까요. You don't need to force a difference you can't hear. You just need to learn which spelling belongs to which word.
이것은 개예요 igeoseun gaeyeyo	This is a dog.	들어 보세요. 이것은 개예요. This is a dog. The vowel here is ㅏ.
이것은 게예요 igeoseun geyeyo	This is a crab.	그리고 이것은 게예요. This is a crab. Here the vowel is ㅑ — but listen, the sound is the same.
개 / 게 gae / ge	dog / crab — identical sound	Wait — 개 and 게 really are the same sound? I was sure I was missing something.
옛날엔 달랐어요 yennalen dallasseoyo	Long ago they were different — not anymore	네, 같아요. A hundred years ago they were different. Over time, in standard speech, they collapsed into one. Most Koreans today truly can't hear them apart either.
귀가 아니라 눈으로 gwiga anira nuneuro	Learn it with your eyes, not your ears	그래서 규칙은 간단해요. Don't train your ear to split the sound. Train your eyes to know the spelling of each word.
문맥으로 구별해요 munmaegeuro gubyeolhaeyo	You tell them apart by context	문맥으로 알아요. By context. A 개 barks, a 게 lives in the sea — the sentence around it makes it clear.



Grammar / Structure Notes

ㅈ = ㅉ

ㅈ = ㅉ — Same sound in modern speech

Spelling stays different, word by word

소리 같음, 철자 다름

소리 같음, 철자 다름 — Same sound, different spelling

이게 왜 중요할까요. You don't need to force a difference you can't hear. You just need to learn which spelling belongs to which word.

이것은 개예요

이것은 + 개 + 예요 — This is a dog.

들어 보세요. 이것은 개예요. This is a dog. The vowel here is ㅐ .

이것은 게예요

이것은 + 게 + 예요 — This is a crab.

그리고 이것은 게예요. This is a crab. Here the vowel is ㅐ — but listen, the sound is the same.

개 / 게

개 / 게 — dog / crab — identical sound

Wait — 개 and 게 really are the same sound? I was sure I was missing something.

Pronunciation Loop

Phrase	How to practice
이것은 게예요	igeoseun geyeyo
게 = crab	ge
이것은 개예요	igeoseun gaeyeyo
개 = dog	gae

Self-Check

- 1 Say ㅈ 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
ㅟ / ㅠ / ㅡ / ㅢ The 'Y' Glide Vowels	A1 Pronunciation: compare ㅟ / ㅠ / ㅡ / ㅢ with this lesson so the boundary becomes clearer.	Open lesson https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-A1-PRON-VOW-004
ㅓ The Vowels English Speakers Mix Up	A1 Pronunciation: compare ㅓ with this lesson so the boundary becomes clearer.	Open lesson https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-A1-PRON-VOW-001
ㅕ / ㅖ / ㅗ Korea's Tricky Compound Vowels	A1 Pronunciation: compare ㅕ / ㅖ / ㅗ with this lesson so the boundary becomes clearer.	Open lesson https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-A1-PRON-VOW-003
ㅋ ㅌ ㅍ Aspirated and Tense Consonants	A1 Pronunciation: compare ㅋ ㅌ ㅍ with this lesson so the boundary becomes clearer.	Open lesson https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-A1-PRON-CNS-001

My Notes

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