



Korean Ladder Study Note

ㅟ / ㅠ / ㅢ

Korea's Tricky Compound Vowels

Level	Topic	Focus
A1 · Beginner TOPIK 1	Pronunciation Vowels	ㅟ / ㅠ / ㅢ Korea's Tricky Compound Vowels

Study Links

[Open this lesson on Korean Ladder](https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-A1-PRON-VOW-003)

<https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-A1-PRON-VOW-003>

[Watch the full video on YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8ReWVsHL96E)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8ReWVsHL96E>

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

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Core Idea

Okay, real talk — I see the word for doctor, 의사, and I have NO idea if it's 'ui-sa', 'i-sa', or 'e-sa'. Why does one little vowel make three sounds?

That's the perfect question. Today's pattern is the three compound vowels: ㅟ, ㅠ, 그리고 ㅢ. They glide — your mouth moves while you say them.

이 세 개가 어려워요. In English, they're tricky because your tongue wants to stop on one vowel — but Korean keeps moving.

So ㅢ at the very start of a word — I should glide it: 으 into 이. Let me reason it: tongue starts flat, slides up to 'ee'.

Conversation Snapshot

Speaker	Korean	Meaning
Junho	하나 씨, 지금 어디 가요? —	Hana, where are you going now?



Speaker	Korean	Meaning
Hana	의사한테 가요. 회의는 끝났어요. —	I'm going to the doctor. The meeting is over.
Junho	아, 그럼 의자에 앉아서 좀 쉬어요. —	Ah, then sit on a chair and rest a bit.
Hana	네, 고마워요. 위층에서 봐요. —	Yes, thanks. See you upstairs.

Vocabulary & Useful Expressions

Word	Meaning	Example
ㅛ · ㅟ · ㅢ oe · wi · ui	Three gliding compound vowels	That's the perfect question. Today's pattern is the three compound vowels: ㅛ, ㅟ, 그리고 ㅢ. They glide — your mouth moves while you say them.
글라이드 geullaideu	a glide — keep the vowel moving	이 세 개가 어려워요. In English, they're tricky because your tongue wants to stop on one vowel — but Korean keeps moving.
외국 oe-guk	foreign country	첫 번째, ㅛ. In modern Seoul Korean it sounds almost exactly like ㅟ — like the English word 'way'. 외국 means 'foreign country.'
외 oe	Korea's Tricky Compound Vowels	들어 보세요 — 외, 외. Say 'we' and round your lips a little. 회사 'company', 교회 'church' — same ㅛ sound.
가위 ga-wi	scissors	두 번째, ㅟ. This one is 'w' plus 'ee', like the start of 'week'. 가위 means 'scissors.'
위 wi	Korea's Tricky Compound Vowels	위, 위 — lips rounded, then glide to 'ee'. 귀 'ear', 쉬다 'to rest'. 어렵지 않아요.
의사 ui-sa	doctor	세 번째 — the famous one, ㅢ. At the start of a word it's a real glide: 'eu' sliding into 'ee'. 의사 means 'doctor.'
의- (단어 첫소리) ui- (word start)	Word-initial ㅢ = full glide 'eu→ee'	So ㅢ at the very start of a word — I should glide it: 으 into 이. Let me reason it: tongue starts flat, slides up to 'ee'.



Grammar / Structure Notes

ㅜ · ㅠ · ㅡ

ㅜ · ㅠ · ㅡ — Three gliding compound vowels

A glide = two vowel positions in one smooth motion.

글라이드

글라이드 — a glide — keep the vowel moving

Don't freeze on one sound.

외국

외 + 국 — foreign country

첫 번째, ㅜ. In modern Seoul Korean it sounds almost exactly like ㅞ — like the English word 'way'. 외국 means 'foreign country.'

가위

가 + 위 — scissors

두 번째, ㅠ. This one is 'w' plus 'ee', like the start of 'week'. 가위 means 'scissors.'

의사

의 + 사 — doctor

세 번째 — the famous one, ㅡ. At the start of a word it's a real glide: 'eu' sliding into 'ee'. 의사 means 'doctor.'

Pronunciation Loop

Phrase	How to practice
외 (we)	oe
위 (wi)	wi
외국 (we-guk)	oe-guk
외국	oe-guk
의사	ui-sa
가위	ga-wi
회이	hoe-ui

Self-Check

- 1 Say ㅜ / ㅠ / ㅡ 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 https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-A1-PRON-VOW-002
ㅊ / ㅅ / ㅆ / ㅈ / ㅊ / ㅆ The 'Y' Glide Vowels	A1 Pronunciation: compare ㅊ / ㅅ / ㅆ with this lesson so the boundary becomes clearer.	Open lesson https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-A1-PRON-VOW-004
ㅊ The Vowels English Speakers Mix Up	A1 Pronunciation: compare ㅊ with this lesson so the boundary becomes clearer.	Open lesson https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-A1-PRON-VOW-001
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

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