



Korean Ladder Study Note

ㅏ

Hearing the Difference in 사다 and 새

Level	Topic	Focus
A1 · Beginner TOPIK 1	Pronunciation Vowels	ㅏ Hearing the Difference in 사다 and 새

Study Links

Open this lesson on Korean Ladder

<https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-A1-PRON-VOW-029>

Watch the full video on YouTube

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5gEegnazlMA>

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

<https://www.koreanladder.com>

Core Idea

Okay, confession. On paper these two vowels differ by one tiny stroke. When you say them fast, I honestly can't tell them apart.

And it matters, right? I heard one of them means to buy, and the other one means a bird.

맞아요. 사다, to buy. 새, a bird, or new. One vowel, and you have a totally different word.

오늘의 핵심은 모음 아와 애예요. Today's focus is two vowels. 아, the open one, and 애, the front one.

Conversation Snapshot

Speaker	Korean	Meaning
Hana	준호 씨, 그거 새 가방이에요? —	Junho, is that a new bag?
Junho	네, 어제 시장에서 샀어요. —	Yes, I bought it at the market yesterday.



Speaker	Korean	Meaning
Hana	얼마에 샀어요? —	How much did you pay for it?
Junho	사만 원이요. 근데 비 오면 물이 썰 것 같아요. —	Forty thousand won. But I think water might leak in when it rains.
Hana	그럼 새 가방을 또 사야겠네요. —	Then you'll have to buy another new bag.

Vocabulary & Useful Expressions

Word	Meaning	Example
ㅏ vs ㅑ a vs ae	open 'ah' vs front 'eh'	오늘의 핵심은 모음 아와 애예요. Today's focus is two vowels. 아, the open one, and 애, the front one.
ㅏ ≠ ㅑ a ≠ ae	Always two different sounds	Good news first. 아 and 애 are clearly different in modern Korean. Every Seoul speaker keeps them apart.
사 · 살 · 달 sa · sal · dal	Hearing the Difference in 사다 and 새	먼저 아. 사. 살. 달. Hear how the jaw drops? 사, 살, 달.
새 · 썰 · 델 sae · sael · dael	Hearing the Difference in 사다 and 새	이제 애. 새. 썰. 델. The jaw comes up a little, and the tongue moves forward. 새, 썰, 델.
사-새 · 살-썰 · 달-델 sa-sae · sal-sael · dal-dael	Hearing the Difference in 사다 and 새	같이 들어 봐요. 사, 새. 살, 썰. 달, 델. Same consonants. Only the vowel moves.
ㅏ → ㅑ a → ae	jaw down, tongue low → jaw up a little, tongue forward	Okay, so what's actually happening inside my mouth? Walk me through it.
ㅏ: 입을 크게, 턱을 아래로 a	ㅏ: mouth wide, jaw down, tongue low and flat	아를 할 때는 입을 크게 벌려요. For 아, open wide. Your jaw drops, and your tongue lies low and flat, like the start of a yawn.
ㅑ: 턱을 조금 올리고, 혀를 앞으로 ae	ㅑ: jaw up a little, tongue forward, lips slightly spread	애를 할 때는 턱을 조금 올리고, 혀를 앞으로 보내요. For 애, raise the jaw a little and push the tongue forward. The lips spread just a tiny bit.



Grammar / Structure Notes

ㅏ vs ㅑ

ㅏ vs ㅑ — open 'ah' vs front 'eh'

One small stroke, a very different mouth shape.

ㅏ ≠ ㅓ

ㅏ ≠ ㅓ — Always two different sounds

Every modern speaker keeps these apart.

ㅏ ≠ ㅕ

ㅏ ≠ ㅕ — Don't confuse this with the ㅓ – ㅕ merger

개 (dog) ≈ 게 (crab) in modern speech, but 가 ≠ 개 — always.

ㅏ → ㅑ

ㅏ → ㅑ — jaw down, tongue low → jaw up a little, tongue forward

Watch your chin in a mirror.

ㅏ: 입을 크게, 턱을 아래로

ㅏ: 입을 크게, 턱을 아래로 — ㅏ: mouth wide, jaw down, tongue low and flat

Like the start of a yawn.

Pronunciation Loop

Phrase	How to practice
사, 살, 달	sa · sal · dal
새, 썰, 델	sae · sael · dael
사, 새, 살, 썰, 달, 델	sa-sae · sal-sael · dal-dael
달에 달까요?	dare daelkkayo?
사 or 새?	sa or sae?
살 or 썰?	sal or sael?
달 or 델?	dal or dael?
달, 델	dael

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
ㅏ The Two Open Vowels Beginners Blur	A1 Pronunciation: compare ㅏ with this lesson so the boundary becomes clearer.	Open lesson https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-A1-PRON-VOW-006
ㅗ The Vowels That Now Sound the Same	A1 Pronunciation: compare ㅗ with this lesson so the boundary becomes clearer.	Open lesson https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-A1-PRON-VOW-002
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 https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-A1-PRON-VOW-004
ㅓ The 'Ya' and 'Yeo' Glides Beginners Swap	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-017

My Notes

Your ladder to fluent Korean. This PDF, the website, and the video lessons are free for personal study.