



## Korean Ladder Study Note

# 우와

## The Rising-Falling Intonation of Surprise and Admiration

| Level                      | Topic                       | Focus                                                          |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|
| A2 · Elementary<br>TOPIK 2 | Pronunciation<br>Intonation | 우와<br>The Rising-Falling Intonation of Surprise and Admiration |

## Study Links

Open this lesson on Korean Ladder

<https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-A2-PRON-INT-003>

Watch the full video on YouTube

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S2lkSSODyJw>

Visit koreanladder.com for all free lessons

<https://www.koreanladder.com>

## Core Idea

Okay, real talk. When I try to say 우와 to mean 'wow,' it comes out totally flat, like I'm reading a grocery list. Why does mine sound so bored?

아, 그거 아주 좋은 질문이에요. In Korean, admiration lives in the pitch. If your voice stays flat, 우와 sounds fake, even if the word is right.

맞아요. 같은 단어라도 억양이 다르면 뜻이 달라요. The same word can sound flat and neutral, or amazed — only the intonation changes.

오늘의 핵심은 이거예요. 감탄할 때는 소리가 확 올라갔다가 부드럽게 내려와요. Surprise and admiration have a sharp rise, then a soft fall.

## Conversation Snapshot

| Speaker | Korean             | Meaning                  |
|---------|--------------------|--------------------------|
| Junho   | 우와, 이 케이크 봐요.<br>— | Whoa, look at this cake. |



| Speaker | Korean             | Meaning                        |
|---------|--------------------|--------------------------------|
| Hana    | 진짜 예쁘다.<br>—       | It's really pretty.            |
| Junho   | 대박, 딸기 좀 봐요.<br>—  | Wow, look at the strawberries. |
| Hana    | 먹기 아까워요.<br>—      | It's almost too pretty to eat. |
| Junho   | 우와, 이 케이크 봐요.<br>— | Whoa, look at this cake.       |
| Hana    | 진짜 예쁘다.<br>—       | It's really pretty.            |

## Vocabulary & Useful Expressions

| Word                                  | Meaning                                                  | Example                                                                                                                      |
|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 감탄 억양<br>gamtan eogyang               | the intonation of admiration / exclamation               | 오늘의 핵심은 이거예요. 감탄할 때는 소리가 확 올라갔다가 부드럽게 내려와요. Surprise and admiration have a sharp rise, then a soft fall.                     |
| 평서문 vs 감탄<br>pyeongseomun vs gamtan   | flat statement vs. rising-falling admiration             | 이걸 '올라갔다 내려오는 억양'이라고 생각하세요. A statement stays flat and drops a little at the end. 감탄 jumps up high first, then glides down.  |
| 예쁘다<br>yeppeuda                       | The Rising-Falling Intonation of Surprise and Admiration | 예쁘다 하나로 볼게요. As a flat statement, 예쁘다 just means 'it's pretty' — calm, even. Listen: 예쁘다.                                    |
| 우와 · 대박 · 진짜<br>uwa · daebak · jinjja | wow · awesome/no way · seriously                         | 감탄사를 몇 개 더 볼게요. 대박, 진짜, 우와 — 이걸 다 감정을 여는 소리예요. These little words open the emotion before the sentence even arrives.         |
| 진짜 맛있다<br>jinjja masitda              | The Rising-Falling Intonation of Surprise and Admiration | 좋아요. 이제 음식으로 가볼게요. 진짜 맛있다. As a flat statement it just means 'it really is tasty.' 진짜 맛있다.                                   |
| 맛있다 / 예쁘다<br>masitda / yeppeuda       | the plain '-다' burst of feeling                          | 한국 사람은 감탄할 때 문장을 짧게 끝내요. Koreans often use the plain 다 form — 맛있다, 예쁘다 — for these bursts of feeling, not the polite 요 form. |
| 혼잣말 같은 감탄<br>honjanmal gateun gamtan  | admiration like thinking out loud                        | 네, 맞아요. 감탄은 나도 모르게 나오는 소리예요. It slips out to yourself. 맛있다 with the rising-falling pitch sounds warm and real, not rude.     |



| Word              | Meaning                                                  | Example                                                                                                                 |
|-------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 예쁘다 ↓<br>yeppeuda | The Rising-Falling Intonation of Surprise and Admiration | 좋아요. 그런데 마지막을 조금 더 내려 보세요.<br>Almost — but your 예쁘다 stayed a little high. Let it fall more, like stepping down.<br>예쁘다. |



## Grammar / Structure Notes

### 감탄 억양

감탄 억양 — the intonation of admiration / exclamation

rise sharply, then fall softly

### 평서문 vs 감탄

평서문 vs 감탄 — flat statement vs. rising-falling admiration

statement: flat → small drop / admiration: high rise → soft fall

### 우와, 예쁘다!

우와 + , + 예쁘 + 다 + ! — Wow, it's beautiful!

네, 딱 언덕이예요. 우와 자체가 감탄사예요. 우와 is itself an exclamation word, so it already carries the rise. Let it lift, then land.

### 우와 · 대박 · 진짜

우와 · 대박 · 진짜 — wow · awesome/no way · seriously

감탄사 — exclamation openers that cue the rise

### 맛있다 / 예쁘다

맛있다 / 예쁘다 — the plain '-다' burst of feeling

감탄 often drops 요 — it's a spontaneous reaction

## Pronunciation Loop

| Phrase                            | How to practice     |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------|
| 예쁘다 (calm: 'it's pretty')         | yeppeuda            |
| 우와, 예쁘다! ('wow, it's beautiful!') | uwa, yeppeuda       |
| flat: 예쁘다 / amazed: 예 ↑ 뿌다 ↓      | yeppeuda → yeppeuda |
| 대박! ('awesome!' / 'no way!')      | daebak              |
| 대박!                               | daebak              |
| 진짜 맛있다 (calm report)              | jinjja masitda      |
| 진짜 맛있다! ('this is SO good!')      | jinjja masitda      |
| 우와, 예쁘다!                          | uwa, yeppeuda       |

## Self-Check

1 Say 우와 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                                                                                                                                                         |
|--------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 나열의 억양<br>Rising Pitch When You List Things            | A2 Pronunciation: compare 나열의 억양 with this lesson so the boundary becomes clearer.     | Open lesson<br><a href="https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-A2-PRON-INT-002">https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-A2-PRON-INT-002</a> |
| 부탁과 제안의 억양<br>Softening Requests with Pitch            | A2 Pronunciation: compare 부탁과 제안의 억양 with this lesson so the boundary becomes clearer. | Open lesson<br><a href="https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-A2-PRON-INT-001">https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-A2-PRON-INT-001</a> |
| 가요<br>끝을 올리면 질문이 돼요                                    | A1 Pronunciation: compare 가요 with this lesson so the boundary becomes clearer.         | Open lesson<br><a href="https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-A1-PRON-INT-001">https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-A1-PRON-INT-001</a> |
| 끊어 읽기<br>Where to Pause So a Long Sentence Stays Clear | C1 Pronunciation: compare 끊어 읽기 with this lesson so the boundary becomes clearer.      | Open lesson<br><a href="https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-C1-PRON-INT-002">https://www.koreanladder.com/lesson.html?id=KOR-C1-PRON-INT-002</a> |

## My Notes

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