



2-23-1990

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BYU ScholarsArchive Citation

Simpson, Mike and Patrick, Melissa (1990) "The Korean Language Trainer: Using HyperCard to teach the Korean Writing System," *Deseret Language and Linguistic Society Symposium*: Vol. 16 : Iss. 1 , Article 14.
Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/dlls/vol16/iss1/14>

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The Korean Language Trainer:
Using HyperCard to teach the Korean writing system

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Among "real" computer programmers, HyperTalk, the programming language of HyperCard (developed by and for Macintosh computers), has been considered a "baby" programming language, one that required no skill or training to use and that no programmer would dare be seen using. Recently, however, HyperCard has been discovered by educators, especially language educators, who have found that the simplicity of the language is no gauge for the efficacy of the programming or the capabilities of the program. This is why we chose to use HyperCard for the Korean Language Trainer (KLT).

HyperCard uses a system of "cards", each new screen being a new card which is viewed in much the same manner as a book is seen, moving from one page to the next. On each card there are buttons and fields which are added to the card by layers. HyperCard is capable of performing different functions by scripts which are connected to the fields, the buttons, the individual cards, and the entire stack of cards. The programming language is that which goes in or on the scripts and the program, as such, is simply all the scripts taken together.

The Korean Language Trainer was developed because of a growing need for people fluent in Korean. Japan has had an economic foot in the door of America's import business for quite some time. In more recent years Korea has begun to demonstrate that the quality and quantity of its goods can rival those of its technological giant of a neighbor, Japan. As Korea has embarked on this trade courtship of America, it has educated many of its people in how to speak English and make a place for themselves in American society. Unfortunately, most Americans have not reciprocated this effort to get acquainted with their new trade partners. Currently, however, there are many who are beginning to see the advantages of being able to communicate with these innovative, energetic people. There are, nevertheless, obstacles in the way of Americans learning Korean. When most would-be language learners search out a language on which to bend their efforts, they conscientiously avoid all Asian languages because of the intricacy of the writing systems. What these people do not understand is that the native Korean alphabet is one of the most logical, easily understood alphabets in the world.

The Korean alphabet was created about 1446 by Korea's king and his best scholars. They felt they needed a writing system other than the Chinese characters they had been using up until then because the characters were created for the Chinese language, not the Korean language, and the two differ widely in grammar as well as vocabulary. The writing system thus developed is unique in all the world; it has symbols which are directly correlated with the shape

of the mouth when pronouncing the sounds represented by the letters. Once understood, this is one of the easiest systems to remember and use.

Most people who use the Roman or Cyrillic alphabet, however, are awed and dismayed at the sight of any Asian writing system, and the thought of having to memorize those senseless squiggles leaves them cold. This is the entire rationale for taking the time and trouble to create a computer program which would teach the writing system to students of Korean. Because the Korean alphabet, known as hangul, is relatively simple to learn, the program merely needs to be interesting enough to entice more students to give the language a chance. All that is needed to learn hangul is practice, and the KLT makes that both entertaining and time-effective.

Designed for the absolute beginner, the KLT opens with a short history of the Korean writing system then goes on to teach the student to read and write Korean. This is accomplished in three steps: the first is to teach recognition of each letter or symbol individually, the second is to teach the correct stroke order (Korean is written using strokes of a pen) of each symbol, and the last is to teach the student the correct order in which to put the letters together to form words. Although not yet completed, there are plans to create two additional sections for the program, one for vocabulary and one for reading comprehension.

The section that teaches recognition of the letters does so using three different methods. The symbol is presented in authentic Korean script with its appropriate romanization. This is the first method and the one used most commonly at present: teach the student to recognize the Korean symbol by correlating it with the romanization which most closely approximates it in sound. There are an additional two methods, however, which have proven far more effective in the long run. These are to accompany the Korean script with a mnemonic and to provide a vocal track which will be automatically correlated with the Korean script so that the letter and the sound will be one in the student's experience. There are two accompanying buttons which the student can "push" (use the Macintosh "mouse" to click on the button) to see the mnemonic and to hear the vocal representation.

The mnemonic is a picture of something which has a name that begins with a sound closely approximating the sound which correlates with the Korean letter. For example, with the symbol for /g/, there is a picture of a horse galloping and the word "gallop" is written below the mnemonic while the Korean letter for /g/ is somehow worked into the picture. This way, when the student sees the Korean letter for /g/ in the future, he/she will automatically visualize the galloping horse and think "/g/".

Additionally, there is the vocal track which has a native Korean speaker pronouncing the /g/ in a Korean accent while the student views the mnemonic. There is also a button which, when pushed, will produce just the voice without the mnemonic for those students

who have already seen and memorized the mnemonic and have no further need of seeing it again or for those to whom the mnemonic is of no real use.

The section which teaches the student to write the Korean alphabet does so by using a graphics function which allows the students to actually see the symbols drawn. When the students first see the symbol, they see it as it looked in the previous section in the original Korean script. When they click on the draw button, the graphics program will draw the letter in the correct stroke order while the vocal track again pronounces the letter, further cementing the association between the letter and the sound in the students' minds.

The final section, at present, is the one which teaches the students the correct order for connecting these letters in order to form words. There are a couple of different patterns for connecting the letters and this section teaches the students under which circumstances each order is used.

Each individual section is followed by a quiz section which allows the student to gauge how well he/she has learned the information in the section. There are always chances for the student to review the section before taking the quiz and there are help sections all along the way. Some of the HyperCard functions which we have taken advantage of are the graphics, the voice capabilities, the card idea for animation (animation can be created in the same way it is in a book; by putting a different graphic on each of several cards, then flipping quickly through the cards, the illusion of movement is created), and the layers of buttons and fields. the programming is fairly simple yet the effect is very professional.

As we have tested this program on actual students, we have found that they have no problems using the Korean Language Trainer and they seem to find the different animations and other features entertaining enough that they didn't mind repeating the lessons. Because the best method of learning is repetition in addition to the mnemonics and other learning tricks, we have found it encouraging that the students are interested enough in the lessons to repeat them willingly.

The Korean Language Trainer is the best method we have seen for teaching new students how to read and write the native Korean writing system. In the future, the KLT will also include vocabulary and reading comprehension exercises for the more advanced students. Using HyperCard for programming has proven cost-effective because of the capabilities and the simplicity of the language.