



Help With: English for Korean Learners

Korean students often have special problems with learning English because of interference from the way they make sentences in their parent tongue. This is true for any language, but this handout is meant to help Korean students in particular.

If you're hungry, Korean literally says, "stomach empty" (배고파). This is fine in Korean because the situation makes it clear—of course it's *my* stomach; I can't tell if *you're* hungry—but it doesn't make sense in English because there is no information about whose stomach is empty. English is a very different kind of language, and because it does not have particle markers in the way that Korean does, you need to be very specific in English.

- Articles and numbering. English needs *a* and *the* and *s* for people to understand the situation. In particular, number agreement is important: "They is a student" is confusing because it contradicts itself grammatically.
- Pronouns. Again, be clearer than you think you need to; you may think that using *she* when the subject is clearly male is obvious, but it confuses the reader.
- Prepositions. English needs these to make the relationship between things clear. Compare *I cook you* and *I cook with you*. The first sentence sounds like I am a cannibal and am going to eat you. The preposition tells us that we are going to cook together.

Some of these prepositions might seem very arbitrary. Unfortunately, you will need to remember them so that an English speaker is not confused: *I see you. I help you. I kiss you. I thank you. I listen to you. I dance with you. I think about you. I look for you.*

If these prepositions are mistaken— *I kiss to you, I dance you, I think you, I look about you*—it will not be clear who is doing what. Who is kissing you? Who is dancing? Because English has no word endings to tell us, it is important to memorize these different prepositional forms.

- Using passive to indicate doer.

I cut my hair. I changed the oil in my car. I fixed a tooth.

These aren't marked as mistakes, because you may be a barber, auto mechanic, or dentist. But if you are not, you need to make it clear *who* did these things. Sometimes a sentence like "I cut my hair" is obvious enough, but it's still sloppy English.

I had my hair cut.
I had the oil in my car changed.
I had my bad tooth fixed.

The frame *had to / need to + [something] + verb + ed / en* has to be used to explain *who* did it.

- Modal auxiliaries. Korean has three modal auxiliary verbs, and so they don't always match the wider range of English meanings well. Koreans will often write *should* in situations where there isn't a moral aspect or choice ("When the sun sets, it should get dark"). On the other hand,

Korean has a much richer list of color adjectives than English does and there can be some strange translations. Don't rely too much on your electronic dictionary!

- The frame *there is / are* doesn't exist in Korean, and so computer translators might say "many problems *exist*" (있어) instead. This syntax is not wrong, but it can be awkward. Learn to use "*there is*" at the beginning of a sentence, which is more natural in English.
- *-ing* and *-ed*. Koreans may write, "I was very *boring* this weekend." This sounds humorous, as though *you* were the boring person. Use "*I was very bored this weekend,*" which means that you had no fun. The gerund suggests that the verb does something: This is confusing, tiring, puzzling. The past participle suggests that something has happened: We were confused. We were tired. We were puzzled.
- Question tags. English answers a negative question this way: "*You don't understand, do you?*" "No." In English this means, no, I don't understand. In many languages you would say, "Yes"—I agree with the statement; I don't understand. English speakers will often add a little ending when the answer is possibly ambiguous: "*No, I don't understand,*" or "*Yes, I do understand, despite what you think.*"

Some Common 'Konglish' Mistakes

⊗ *I do a lot of stuffs on the weekend and sometimes I look for informations.*

These are uncountable nouns, except for a few set phrases such as *foodstuffs*.

☑ *I do a lot of stuff on the weekend and sometimes I look for information.*

⊗ *Most of people like beer.*

The preposition is not necessary when you are talking about things in general (people):

☑ *Most people like beer.* You do need an *of* with pronouns or articles:

☑ *Most of them were at the party* or *most of the students were at the party.*

⊗ *In Asia there are increasing career women.*

This means that the women themselves are increasing—they are getting fatter! Make sure it's clear what noun your adjective is modifying.

☑ *In Asia there are increasing numbers of career women.*

⊗ *I felt some guilty.*

It's easy to confuse adjectives and nouns of emotion.

☑ *I felt some guilt* or *I felt guilty.*

⊗ *This is a nonsense.*

Nonsense is uncountable.

☑ *This is nonsense.*

⊗ *The problem was disappeared.*

Some words like *Disappeared* and *survived* aren't used in a passive sense. Say the problem has disappeared, or you have survived.

⊗ *I am a 23 years old man.*

This can be confusing, but try to remember the difference. If *old* is the adjective, have a plural: *I am 23 years old.* If another word is the adjective, omit the plural and put in a hyphen: *I am a 23 year-old man.*