Korean sound changes 받침

Spelling stays, sound moves. Hangul spells a word the way it's built, and the sound adjusts to the letters around it. Each example shows the written form, then what you hear in standard Seoul Korean, changed blocks in pink.

The romanisation spells the sound, so it shows the kk, tt, pp, ss and jj you hear: 학교 → 학꾜 **hakkyo** (usually written hakgyo).

A bottom letter (받침) makes only seven sounds

ㄱ **k**	ㄱ ㅋ ㄲ all said ㄱ	부엌 → 부**억** **bueok** · kitchen	밖 → **박** **bak** · outside
ㄴ **n**	ㄴ only itself	산 said as written **san** · mountain	
ㄷ **t**	ㄷ ㅅ ㅆ ㅈ ㅊ ㅌ ㅎ all said ㄷ	옷 → **옫** **ot** · clothes	낮 → **낟** **nat** · daytime
		꽃 → **꼳** **kkot** · flower	밭 → **받** **bat** · field
ㄹ **l**	ㄹ only itself	물 said as written **mul** · water	
ㅁ **m**	ㅁ only itself	밤 said as written **bam** · night	
ㅂ **p**	ㅂ ㅍ all said ㅂ	앞 → **압** **ap** · front	잎 → **입** **ip** · leaf
ㅇ **ng**	ㅇ only itself	강 said as written **gang** · river	

Said short and stopped. At the end of a word ㄱ, ㄷ and ㅂ aren't released: close your mouth or tongue and stop, with no puff of air. That's why 옷 → **옫 ot**, 낮 → **낟 nat** and 꽃 → **꼳 kkot** all end the same way. The real letter only comes back when a vowel follows (page 2).

Two bottom letters: only one is said

ㄵ → ㄴ
앉다 → **안**따
antta · to sit

ㄶ → ㄴ
많다 → **만**타
manta · to be a lot

ㄺ → ㄱ
닭 → **닥**
dak · chicken
읽다 → **익**따
iktta · to read

ㄻ → ㅁ
젊다 → **점**따
jeomtta · to be young

ㄼ → ㄹ
여덟 → 여**덜**
yeodeol · eight

ㄾ → ㄹ
싫다 → **실**타
silta · to dislike

ㅄ → ㅂ
값 → **갑**
gap · price
없다 → **업**따
eoptta · to not have

Rare ones
ㄳ → ㄱ ㅀ → ㄹ
ㄽ → ㄹ ㄿ → ㄹ
only in a handful of words

Rule of thumb: the left letter is said, except in ㄺ, ㄻ and ㅀ, which keep the right one (ㅍ said as ㅂ).

A few vary. In verbs ㄺ keeps ㄹ before ㄱ: 읽고 → **일**꼬 **ilkko**. And 밟다 → **밥**따 **baptta** (to step on) keeps ㅂ, unlike other ㄼ words.

Linking 연음

ㅇ at the top of a block is silent: it just holds the place of the vowel. When the next block starts with it, the bottom letter moves over and fills the gap. That's why Korean sounds so smooth.

국 + 어 → 구거

ㄱ moves into the empty ㅇ

밥 + 을 → 바블

ㅂ moves the same way

One bottom letter: it moves

한국어 → 한**구거**
hangugeo · the Korean language

음악 → **으막**
eumak · music

발음 → **바름**
bareum · pronunciation

단어 → **다너**
daneo · word

직업 → **지겁**
jigeop · job

일요일 → **이료**일
iryoil · Sunday

옷이 → **오시**
osi · clothes + 이

영어 said as written
yeongeo · English

The real letter comes back. Alone, 옷 → **옫** **ot**, but 옷이 → **오시** **osi**: a letter that moves keeps its own sound. And ㅇ at the bottom is a real ng, so it stays put: **영어** is said as written.

Two bottom letters: the second one moves

앉아요
→ **안자**요
anjayo
I sit

닭이
→ **달기**
dalgi
chicken + 이

젊어요
→ **절머**요
jeolmeoyo
they're young

값이
→ **갑씨**
gapssi
price + 이

없어요
→ **업써**요
eopsseoyo
there isn't any

After ㅂ or ㄱ, a moving ㅅ doubles: 값이 → **갑씨** **gapssi**, 없어요 → **업써**요 **eopsseoyo**. Now you can hear both letters you saw on page 1.

Double letters move whole

밖에 → **바께**
bakke · outside + 에

있어요 → **이써**요
isseoyo · there is, I have

ㄲ and ㅆ are one letter, so they move as one and stay tense.

ㅎ at the bottom goes quiet before a vowel

좋아요 → **조**아요
joayo · it's good

놓아요 → **노**아요
noayo · I put it down

많이 → **마니**
mani · a lot

싫어요 → **시러**요
sireoyo · I don't want to

With ㄶ and ㅀ the ㅎ disappears and the ㄴ or ㄹ moves over: 많이 → **마니** **mani**, 싫어요 → **시러**요 **sireoyo**. You'll hear this in 괜찮아요 → 괜**차나**요 **gwaenchanayo** every day.

In quick speech ㅎ also fades between other sounds, so in **전화** (phone) and **은행** (bank) it can be hard to hear. Careful speech keeps it, and so does this sheet.

Nasal sounds and ㄹ 비음화

ㄱ, ㄷ and ㅂ can't sit right before ㄴ or ㅁ. They turn into the nose sound made in the same place in your mouth: ㄱ becomes ㅇ, ㄷ becomes ㄴ, ㅂ becomes ㅁ. Every letter in the family goes the same way.

ㄱ → ㅇ

also ㅋ ㄲ

국물 → 궁물
gungmul · soup, broth

작년 → 장년
jangnyeon · last year

박물관 → 방물관
bangmulgwan · museum

ㄷ → ㄴ

also ㅅ ㅆ ㅈ ㅊ ㅌ ㅎ

거짓말 → 거진말
geojinmal · a lie

옛날 → 옌날
yennal · the old days

콧물 → 콘물
konmul · runny nose

ㅂ → ㅁ

also ㅍ

합니다 → 함니다
hamnida · does (formal)

십만 → 심만
simman · 100,000

앞문 → 암문
ammun · front door

You hear it in every formal sentence: -ㅂ니다 and -습니다 are never said with a b. 합니다 → 함니다 **hamnida** is the classic.

ㄴ next to ㄹ: both are said ㄹ

유음화 · yueumhwa

신라 → 실라
silla · Silla, an old kingdom

연락 → 열락
yeollak · getting in touch

한류 → 할류
hallyu · the Korean wave

난로 → 날로
nallo · heater

설날 → 설랄
seollal · Lunar New Year

물냉면 → 물랭면
mullaengmyeon · cold noodles in broth

ㄹ after ㅁ or ㅇ is said ㄴ

심리 → 심니
simni · state of mind

종로 → 종노
jongno · Jongno, part of Seoul

음료수 → 음뇨수
eumnyosu · soft drink

After ㄱ or ㅂ, both letters change

국립 → 궁닙
gungnip · national, as in a park

협력 → 혐녁
hyeomnyeok · working together

대학로 → 대항노
daehangno · Daehangno, a street in Seoul

ㄹ only follows ㄹ. After any other bottom letter, ㄹ is said as ㄴ, or pulls a ㄴ into ㄹ. Then the nasal rule above can kick in too, which is how 국립 → 궁닙 **gungnip** ends up with two changes.

A few vary. Some long words made from two parts turn the ㄹ into ㄴ even after ㄴ, instead of making ㄹㄹ. Learn those as you meet them.

Tense and puffed sounds 경음화

After a ㄱ, ㄷ or ㅂ sound, the next ㄱ, ㄷ, ㅂ, ㅅ or ㅈ is said tense: ㄲ, ㄸ, ㅃ, ㅆ, ㅉ. It's never written, but it always happens, so you can predict it.

학교 → 학**꾜**
hakkyo · school

식당 → 식**땅**
sikttang · restaurant

국밥 → 국**빱**
gukppap · rice in soup

맥주 → 맥**쭈**
maekjju · beer

늦게 → **늗께**
neutkke · late

책상 → 책**쌍**
chaekssang · desk

Tensing you can't see coming

물고기 → 물**꼬**기
mulkkogi · fish

비빔밥 → 비빔**빱**
bibimppap · bibimbap

문법 → 문**뻡**
munppeop · grammar

인기 → 인**끼**
inkki · popularity

손가락 → 손**까**락
sonkkarak · finger

갈 거예요 → 갈 **꺼**예요
gal kkeoyeyo · I'm going to go

Learn these with the word. Tensing also happens in many words made of two parts, like 물 + 고기, and after a -ㄹ form, like 갈. Nothing in the spelling tells you, so dictionaries give the sound in brackets.

ㅎ + ㄱ, ㄷ, ㅂ or ㅈ: one puffed sound 격음화 · gyeogeumhwa

ㅎ first
at the bottom

좋다 → **조타**
jota · to be good

노랗다 → 노**라타**
norata · to be yellow

그렇지 → 그**러치**
geureochi · right, of course

ㅎ second
at the top

축하
→ **추카**
chuka
congratulations

입학
→ **이팍**
ipak
starting school

못해요
→ **모태**요
motaeyo
I can't

따뜻해요
→ 따**뜨태**요
ttatteutaeyo
it's warm

생각해요
→ 생**가캐**요
saenggakaeyo
I think

The two merge into one strong letter: ㄱ + ㅎ is ㅋ, ㄷ + ㅎ is ㅌ, ㅂ + ㅎ is ㅍ, ㅈ + ㅎ is ㅊ, whichever comes first. ㅅ counts as ㄷ here, so 못 + 해요 gives ㅌ.

ㄷ or ㅌ + 이: said 지 or 치 구개음화 · gugaeeumhwa

같이
→ **가치**
gachi
together

굳이
→ **구지**
guji
going out of your way

해돋이
→ 해**도지**
haedoji
sunrise

끝이
→ **끄치**
kkeuchi
the end + 이

닫히다
→ **다치**다
dachida
to be shut

Only before an added 이 or 히, like a particle or an ending. Inside a word 디 and 티 stay as they are: **어디**, **티셔츠**.

Putting it together 들리는 대로

All the rules on one strip

받침
batchim
seven final sounds
꽃 → 꼳 kkot

연음
yeoneum
the bottom letter moves over
음악 → 으막 eumak

히읗 탈락
hieut tallak
ㅎ goes quiet before a vowel
좋아요 → 조아요 joayo

격음화
gyeogeumhwa
ㅎ makes a puffed sound
축하 → 추카 chuka

비음화
bieumhwa
nasal sounds, and ㄹ said ㄴ
국물 → 궁물 gungmul
종로 → 종노 jongno

유음화
yueumhwa
ㄴ next to ㄹ is said ㄹ
연락 → 열락 yeollak

경음화
gyeongeumhwa
tense after ㄱ ㄷ ㅂ
학교 → 학꾜 hakkyo

구개음화
gugaeeumhwa
ㄷ ㅌ + 이 said 지 치
같이 → 가치 gachi

Twelve everyday phrases, written and heard

1	감사합니다	→	감사함니다	gamsahamnida thank you	nasal
2	괜찮아요	→	괜차나요	gwaenchanayo it's OK	linking · ㅎ drops
3	맛있어요	→	마시써요	masisseoyo it's delicious	linking
4	반갑습니다	→	반갑씀니다	bangapsseumnida nice to meet you	nasal · tense
5	잘 먹겠습니다	→	잘 먹껟씀니다	jal meokketsseumnida said before you eat	final sound · nasal · tense
6	저는 학생입니다	→	저는 학쌩임니다	jeoneun hakssaengimnida I'm a student	nasal · tense
7	알겠습니다	→	알겓씀니다	algetsseumnida understood	final sound · nasal · tense
8	잘 지냈어요?	→	잘 지내써요?	jal jinaesseoyo? how have you been?	linking
9	읽었어요	→	일거써요	ilgeosseoyo I read it	linking
10	꽃이 예뻐요	→	꼬치 예뻐요	kkochi yeppeoyo the flowers are pretty	linking
11	어떻게 해요?	→	어떠케 해요?	eotteoke haeyo? what do I do?	ㅎ puff
12	한국 음식 좋아해요	→	한국 음식 조아해요	hanguk eumsik joahaeyo I like Korean food	ㅎ drops

-습니다 and -ㅂ니다: the ㅂ is always said ㅁ, and after a bottom letter 습 is said 씀: 반갑습니다 → 반갑씀니다 bangapsseumnida. So every formal ending sounds like -mnida.

-요 goes up or down. The same words make a statement or a question. Said falling, 가요. means I'm going. Said rising at the end, 가요? asks are you going?

Practice 연습

How: cover the small print with a strip of paper. Read each word out loud the way it sounds, not the way it's spelled, then slide the strip down to check. Every rule on this sheet turns up at least once.

1
입맛
appetite

임맏 immat
final sound, nasal

2
학년
school year

항년 hangnyeon
nasal

3
끝나요
it ends

끈나요 kkeunnayo
final sound, nasal

4
국어
Korean, the school subject

구거 gugeo
linking

5
무릎이
knee + 이

무르피 mureupi
linking

6
빨갛다
to be red

빨가타 ppalgata
ㅎ puff

7
급해요
I'm in a hurry

그패요 geupaeyo
ㅎ puff

8
밥상
dinner table

밥쌍 bapssang
tense

9
숙제
homework

숙쩨 sukjje
tense

10
옆집
next door

엽찝 yeopjjip
final sound, tense

11
정류장
bus stop

정**뉴**장 jeongnyujang
ㄹ → ㄴ

12
신랑
bridegroom

실랑 sillang
ㄹㄹ

13
끓여요
I boil it

끄려요 kkeuryeoyo
linking, ㅎ drops

14
흙
soil

흑 heuk
final sound

15
맑아요
it's clear

말가요 malgayo
linking

16
백만
a million

뱅만 baengman
nasal

17
몇
how many

멷 myeot
final sound

18
웃어요
they laugh

우서요 useoyo
linking

19
읽는
reading

잉는 ingneun
final sound, nasal

20
맏이
the eldest child

마지 maji
linking, 이 → 지 치

Listen for it. Once you know these rules, Korean subtitles stop looking different from what you hear. Read a line, guess how it sounds, then let the actor tell you.

Meet a word you don't know? In Kitsumi, hover any word in subtitles to see what it means.