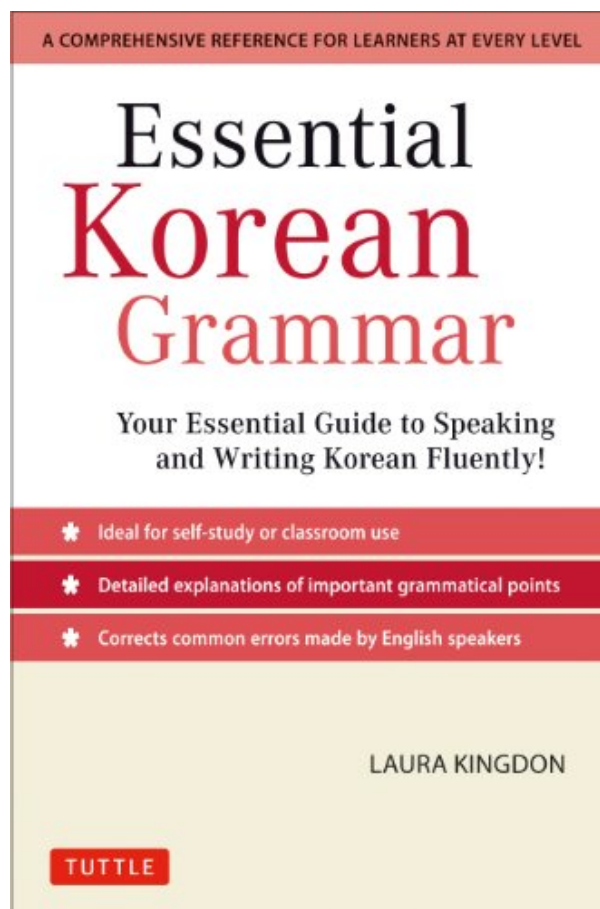


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Your Essential Guide to Speaking  
and Writing Korean Fluently!

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"...the best thing is that since it's written by a foreigner, she knows best on where foreigners normally make mistake at and how difficult it is to learn another completely different language with different sentence structures and expressions that are non existence in English." —Jamieliew.com blog

"It's written in a very approachable style — like having someone at the side talk to you and guide you along. Very structured and the book uses a lot of tables, which makes things very clear." —Hangudrama blog

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Do you want your Korean language skills to shine? Then Essential Korean Grammar offers exactly what you need to finally understand and express which grammar option is best. Having a solid understanding of grammar is essential to effectively learn Korean.

Essential Korean Grammar gives you excellent examples that lay out the best grammar options for communicating, and when to use each option. The grammar items are cleverly rated so you can determine what's most useful for you to study, based on your Korean knowledge level and your plans. There is a star rating system, from 5 stars ("critical"; with these under your belt you can communicate almost everything you need to say) to 1 star (don't worry about this unless there's some reason you need to know it—for example, the TOPIK exam). Essential Korean Grammar is a toolbox to help you form correct and natural-sounding sentences, and determine which grammar you need for reading or writing Korean. It details:

- How to combine grammar points with each type of word.
- How it is similar to and different from related grammar points.
- Commonly used expressions.
- Things for learners to watch out for.

The example sentences for each grammar point use simple vocabulary that even a beginner will know. A perfect supplement to any Korean language textbook!

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9 of 9 people found the following review helpful.

Lacks an English index, otherwise quite good

By John Armstrong

This book has three parts and two appendices: Part One: Basics of Korean (about 25 pages); Part Two: Grammar Points (about 330 pages); Part Three: Frequently Seen Word Parts (4 pages); Appendix 1: How to Sound like a Native (7 pages); and Appendix 2: Useful Korean Language Resources (3 pages).

The core of the book, accounting for 85% of the total pages is Part Two: Grammar Points. It's basically a Korean pattern dictionary, which includes a large, unnumbered (and uncounted by me) set of entries grouped into 47 sections. The sections are pretty coherent and tend to be functionally oriented, bringing together patterns that can be used to express a particular kind of concept and explaining how they differ or for that matter don't, i.e. are interchangeable.

The problem with this section for me is that it is very hard to find things in it. If you already know the Korean pattern you can simply look it up in the index, but if you are trying to find the Korean pattern or patterns that you can use to express something you can only characterize in English you will have a hard time, because it's often not easy to guess from the section names, and there are no English entries in the index (or, alternatively, there is no English index to complement the Korean index).

Apart from this problem, which I think is a major one, there are other things that could be better (for example the Part One: Basics of Korean, is kind of shaky, and the lists of examples are often more repetitive than they need to be; also the Romanization, though intending to follow the South Korean 2000 Revised Romanization standard, is rather inconsistent), but the overall quality of the book, and particularly that of the Grammar Points, is high, and offers information and insights not found in other books.

I would probably give the book five stars if it had an effective English index. As it is I give it four.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful.

Four Stars

By Joe Harris

An excellent resource for intermediate and advanced Korean language students.

3 of 5 people found the following review helpful.

Not what it claims to be

By Patrick

This book was extremely disappointing — for several reasons, but mostly because it is not what it claims to be: As other reviewers have noted, this book is something of a “pattern dictionary,” and is in fact NOT a “comprehensive grammar” as it claims to be. It is also not the best written text I have ever attempted to read, and indeed I could only stomach about 60% of the book. That said, in fairness to the author, who undoubtedly knows quite a bit about Korean, I will enumerate the book's good points first, before exploding with the bad ones.

The book has the following going for it:

- (1) It collates structures according to semantics, which can make selecting a given construction for use to convey a particular meaning easier.
- (2) It rates constructions according to the degree to which they resemble spoken or written language, and also as to how common they are. This is valuable information for a learner, and is often not addressed in grammars.
- (3) The author does address various nuances pertinent to the constructions she delineates, such as contexts in which they cannot be used, &c.

(4) It looks nice. (Seriously, it's well organized on the page, which is surprisingly satisfying — and I have read too many grammars that are so ugly to the eye that it is actually distracting and confusing.)

That's not very many good points, to be sure, but they are there. Now for the negatives.

First of all, I have to get my own petty annoyances out of the way:

(1) The author's attempts at humor — which are far too frequent — are horribly dull and corny, and though it may simply be my personal preference, I cannot but feel that a “comprehensive grammar” should present itself a bit more professionally and abstain from bad jokes every few paragraphs.

(2) If I had a dollar for every time the author uses the word “expression” — in referring to anything from inflectional or derivational morphemes to phrase-level constituents to entire constructions — I would be filthy rich. Seriously, it's annoying, and confusingly vague.

Another issue that is not so petty, and that other reviewers have noted, is that the Romanization of the Korean Hangeul is inconsistent and contains a fair number of outright mistakes. She is also inconsistent as to whether she uses the term “descriptive verb” or “adjective” to describe a particular lexical category in Korean; I frankly don't care which she picks, but I wish that she would stick with one.

On a more serious note, this book claims to be (and I quote from the front cover) “a complete overview of Korean grammar for learners at all levels from beginner to advanced.” Not one thing about this claim is true: This book is not comprehensive, it is not a grammar (at least not one worthy of the name), and it is not for all learners. In fact, the author herself, in the appendix for other Korean learning resources at the back of the book, recommends her own text for only intermediate-level learners, and after reading most of it, I am inclined to agree: Beginners should stay away, and advanced students would probably find it dull. (I myself am a beginner and got nothing from this book.) The book she recommends for advanced learners, Martin's *A Reference Grammar of Korean*, is pricier, but is, as she acknowledges, written more for linguists and is therefore a more complete and accurate picture of Korean grammar, for those willing to work with a text of greater technicality and girth.

In fact, though it would seem that she has, the impression I get from this book, being a linguist myself, is that Ms. Kingdon has never read a linguistic text in her life: She makes numerous errors in terminology and explanation that anyone with even a basic grasp of linguistics would not make, for instance (just some of the examples that jumped out at me):

(1) Calling postpositions “ending prepositions” (an oxymoron, as is obvious to anyone with a functional knowledge of English morphology).

(2) Have I mentioned the massive overuse of the word “expression”?

(3) Claiming that “the past tense tells us that something is finished” — no, ma'am, it does not. Past tense means occurring before the time of utterance. Depicting an event as finished is aspect, not tense.

(4) Claiming that the vowel represented by  $\text{?}$  (in IPA,  $/\text{?}/$ , Romanized variously as u or eu) elides from verb stems on affixation (though the term affix has yet to appear in any of my reading — it's always “expression”) of the past morpheme “because it's a weak vowel and easily pushed around by stronger vowel sounds.” No, it is not: There is nothing weak about that vowel. It is perfectly stable in, for instance, Korean's sister, Japanese. It is simply a quirk of Korean that the vowel elides in that position.

(5) Vast overuse of the term “conjugation” that nearly but doesn't quite rival that of “expression”: Conjugation refers to inflection of verbs. Ms. Kingdon seems to think that any grammatical construction can be crammed under this term. Pages upon pages in this book are occupied by tables entitled “How it's conjugated” — and the majority of the time, there is no conjugation present.

There are others, believe me, but these are just ones that I can remember off the top of my head and were particularly annoying or salient.

Of course, I do not necessarily expect Ms. Kingdon to be an out and out linguist. Most language teachers are not. Linguistics can indeed become far more technical than most learners care to know, and I do not expect her to address such issues in a reference grammar. In fact, sometimes the technicality of linguistics is an impediment to learners who are not well-versed in it, and I am willing to accept some tradeoff: For instance, the use of the term “future tense” to refer to a particular morpheme in Korean, while – though I am still new to Korean linguistics in particular, so I cannot be too firm on this – I have read that it is more properly an irrealis mood marker. That said, however, I have read several reference grammars for multiple languages in my day, and I can say that the best were always at least informed by basic linguistic knowledge and structured according to the basic outline of metalinguistics (if not written by out and out linguists): phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics (and occasionally pragmatics added in).

The most damning evidence that Ms. Kingdon is rather linguistically inept is her terming this book a “comprehensive grammar,” which I have said before is completely wrong. Firstly, this book is not a grammar: Ms. Kingdon seems to think that “grammar” means listing a bunch of structures used in the language and giving tidbits of information about how to use them. That is a dictionary. Grammar refers to the rules and principles that govern the use of language by native speakers.

Secondly, this book is far from “comprehensive”: It does not address the phonetics or phonology of Korean AT ALL, both of which are integral parts of grammar. It barely touches on morphology, and while the majority of the book is basically syntax, it nevertheless ignores several important syntactic questions. For instance, not once did I ever see this book mention that the basic word order of Korean is SOV. That’s kinda important to know, especially for a beginner. Likewise, in the field of pragmatics, since the book is written to an English audience and supposedly one which includes beginners, I would think that Ms. Kingdon would explain the nature of Korean as a topic-oriented language, as opposed to a subject-oriented language like English. Also kinda important. No such explanation exists in this book as far as I know.

I could go on, but at this point you get the picture. I apologize if this has been rather desultory — I’m a bit miffed at having paid good money on this book, which to me is now mostly worthless. The bottom line is this: If you are serious about studying Korean grammar, and especially if you are a beginning or advanced learner, this book is a waste of your money. Save up and buy Martin’s — I haven’t read it yet, but I’m looking forward to it. Couple that with a good dictionary and some patience and you will learn far more than this book will ever teach you.

I would have given this book two stars because it isn't all that bad as long as you don't believe it to be a "comprehensive grammar," but then Amazon showed me that one star means "I hate it," and I hate this book, so yeah.

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