COGNITIVE AND CULTURAL BARRIERS IN SYNONIM ACQUISITION: A PSYCOLINGUISTIC STUDY OF INDONESIAN LEARNERS OF KOREAN

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Abstract: This study investigates the challenges Indonesian learners face in understanding Korean synonyms, particularly adjectives that share similar literal meanings but differ in contextual, emotional, and cultural usage. Adopting a mixed-methods approach, the research combines qualitative data from interviews, classroom observations, and task analyses with quantitative survey responses from 60 intermediate-level learners. The findings reveal significant difficulties in distinguishing near-synonyms such as 아름답다 (beautiful) vs. 예쁘다 (pretty) and 행복하다 (happy) vs. 기쁘다 (glad), primarily due to limited exposure to nuanced usage and the influence of the learners' native language. Drawing on theories from psycholinguistics, including semantic processing and working memory, the study interprets these challenges as cognitive in nature, involving high lexical ambiguity and processing load. The results underscore the importance of context-based instruction and culturally informed vocabulary teaching. Furthermore, the study suggests that language proficiency assessments should account for contextual and pragmatic competence to more accurately measure learners' depth of vocabulary knowledge. These insights contribute to both applied linguistics and psycholinguistic approaches to second language acquisition, offering pedagogical strategies for enhancing lexical precision and cultural fluency in Korean language education.
Keywords: Psycholinguistic, Language Acquisition, Cognitive Processing.

INTRODUCTION:

The Korean language has gained substantial global attention, including in Indonesia, driven by the widespread popularity of Korean cultural exports such as K-pop, dramas, and films. This cultural diffusion has sparked a growing interest in learning Korean, particularly among the younger generation. Language serves not only as a tool for communication but also as a cognitive gateway to understanding the embedded values and social norms within a culture (Youngsun et al., 2024; Wang & Kelly, 2023). Consequently, formal and informal educational institutions increasingly offer Korean language programs to meet this rising demand. However, the growth in learners also brings new pedagogical and cognitive challenges, particularly in helping students process and internalize complex linguistic features of the Korean language.

One of the major psycholinguistic challenges in learning Korean lies in its lexical semantics, especially in the comprehension and appropriate use of **synonyms**. In Korean, many synonymous expressions carry subtle differences not just in meaning, but also in **pragmatic, emotional, and cultural connotations**, which require high levels of **semantic discrimination and contextual sensitivity**—areas tightly linked to cognitive processing in second language acquisition (Karubaba et al., 2024; Prihandoko et al., 2019). For instance, while 아름답다 (*areumdapda*) and 예쁘다 (*yeppeuda*) may both translate to "beautiful," the former is typically reserved for formal or poetic contexts, whereas the latter is used more casually. These distinctions are cognitively demanding for Indonesian learners, whose native language often allows for broader synonym use without strong contextual constraints.

From a cognitive perspective, learners must develop not only vocabulary knowledge but also **semantic networks** that incorporate sociocultural and emotional cues—processes that require deeper lexical encoding and contextual mapping in the mental lexicon (Yoon & Seo, 2024). This becomes particularly challenging when learning materials and instructional approaches focus solely on surface-level translations, ignoring the nuanced processing required for selecting context-appropriate synonyms. As a result, students may overgeneralize or misuse certain expressions, leading to communication breakdowns or unintended social missteps. For example, using 아름답다 to casually compliment a friend may be perceived as overly formal or

awkward, demonstrating a **mismatch between linguistic choice and sociolinguistic appropriateness**.

To address this gap, this study investigates the **cognitive and psycholinguistic factors** influencing Indonesian learners' ability to distinguish and use Korean synonyms appropriately. Specifically, it explores how learners process meaning nuances, contextual usage, and cultural associations tied to synonymous expressions. By situating the analysis within psycholinguistic theory—particularly models of lexical access, semantic priming, and context-driven language processing—this study aims to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how second-language learners internalize and deploy complex lexical items. Ultimately, the research seeks to inform both language pedagogy and cognitive models of bilingual lexical development, while also supporting Indonesian learners in achieving more accurate and culturally sensitive Korean language use.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Foreign language learning always involves cognitive and linguistic challenges, one of which is understanding synonyms in the cultural and social context of the target language. In learning Korean, synonyms are an important lexical component that is often difficult for foreign learners, including Indonesian learners, to fully grasp. Previous research has shown that Korean synonyms not only differ in literal meaning but also reflect variations in usage based on formality, social relationships, and cultural nuances (Kim & Nam, 2016). For example, words like 아름답다(*areumdapda*) and 예쁘다(*yeppeuda*), although both denote "beautiful," are applied in different social situations depending on context, emotional tone, and relational proximity (Choi, 2018).

In the context of second language acquisition (SLA), Ellis (1994) emphasized the importance of understanding semantic relationships between words, especially in typologically distant languages. For Indonesian learners, whose native language treats synonyms more flexibly, the contextual sensitivity required in Korean often leads to confusion. From a **psycholinguistic perspective**, this difficulty can be linked to **semantic processing**—the mental operations involved in interpreting and selecting meaning among near-synonymous lexical items. Learners must activate and differentiate similar lexical entries in their mental lexicon, a process that imposes significant **cognitive load** (Sweller, 1988) and requires **working memory** resources to hold multiple meanings and social cues simultaneously during communication tasks.

Brown (2007) supports a **context-based approach**, which embeds vocabulary instruction within authentic communicative situations. While this is effective pedagogically, from a cognitive standpoint, context-based learning also reduces **extraneous cognitive load** by anchoring meaning in real-life scenarios, aiding in **long-term semantic encoding**. Similarly, **Baddeley's (2003)** model of **working memory** in language learning suggests that contextualized input supports the integration of new vocabulary into long-term memory by enabling learners to chunk linguistic information meaningfully.

Lee and Park (2020) further demonstrated that learners who are familiar with the cultural framework of the target language perform better in choosing contextually appropriate synonyms. Their study aligns with **Anderson's (1983)** theory of **schema activation**, which posits that comprehension is facilitated when new input connects with existing cultural or experiential knowledge structures. In this case, cultural awareness strengthens the learner's ability to interpret and produce socially appropriate lexical choices.

Yun and Han (2019) highlighted a practical concern: many existing learning resources fail to include the nuanced differences between synonyms. These resources typically focus on literal translations, omitting usage-based distinctions. They recommend task-based learning and case study approaches to help learners navigate the **contextual variables that affect lexical selection**. This is consistent with **Laufer's (1997)** findings that **depth of vocabulary knowledge**—including connotative meaning and contextual appropriateness—is essential for fluency, and is often a greater predictor of success than mere breadth of vocabulary.

This study adopts **Halliday's (1985)** Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) as a theoretical framework, emphasizing the importance of situational and cultural context in the construction of meaning. While SFL provides a strong socio-semantic lens, this study is further enriched by integrating **psycholinguistic theories** on **semantic processing**, **working memory**, and **cognitive load**, which offer insights into the mental mechanisms learners employ when distinguishing between near-synonyms. By combining sociolinguistic and cognitive perspectives, the study aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the difficulties faced by Indonesian learners and to suggest effective interventions that address both the **surface-level linguistic structures** and the **underlying cognitive operations** involved in synonym acquisition.

METHOD

3.1. Research Design

This study uses a **qualitative descriptive design**, supported by a **quantitative component** to enhance analytical depth. The qualitative aspect seeks to explore and describe the difficulties faced by Indonesian learners in understanding Korean synonyms—particularly regarding meaning nuances, usage contexts, and cultural implications. According to Sulaeman and Goziyah (2019), qualitative research emphasizes rich, narrative explanations over numerical data, enabling in-depth exploration of learner experiences.

To complement this, a **quantitative survey** was employed to identify patterns and frequencies of difficulties encountered. This mixed-methods approach allows for both exploratory depth and measurable data on how learners cognitively and contextually process Korean synonyms.

3.2. Participants and Sampling

The participants were **60 Indonesian learners of Korean**, aged 18–25, from three different universities in Indonesia that offer Korean language programs. Participants were selected using **purposive sampling**, focusing on intermediate-level learners (TOPIK level 2 or equivalent) who had studied Korean for at least one year. This group was considered to have sufficient exposure to the Korean language to encounter synonym-related challenges but still be in the learning process.

3.3. Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected through three main qualitative methods:

- **Semi-structured interviews** with 15 participants to gather in-depth insights into personal learning experiences and specific challenges in synonym comprehension.
- **Classroom observations**, conducted over four weeks, to observe real-time usage and learner responses to synonym-related tasks in instructional settings.
- **Task analysis**, in which learner assignments and exercise sheets were reviewed to identify patterns of error or confusion in synonym usage.

For the quantitative component, a **structured questionnaire** was distributed to all 60 participants. The questionnaire consisted of 25 items covering the following domains: (1) Recognition of synonym meaning nuances (2) Ability to choose synonyms in social contexts, and (3) Cultural understanding of synonym usage.

To ensure **instrument reliability**, a pilot test was conducted with 20 similar learners, and the internal consistency of the questionnaire was measured using **Cronbach's alpha**, which yielded a reliability score of **0.82**, indicating good internal consistency.

3.4. Data Analysis Procedures

Qualitative analysis followed the framework of **Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014)**, involving three stages:
1. **Data reduction**: Filtering and categorizing data from interviews, observations, and task analyses.
2. **Data display**: Presenting findings in the form of narrative excerpts, matrices, and tables that highlight synonym usage and learner challenges.
3. **Conclusion drawing**: Interpreting patterns and drawing meaning related to the influence of context and culture on synonym comprehension.

Quantitative analysis involved descriptive statistics using **SPSS**, including frequency counts, mean scores, and standard deviations to measure:

- The extent of confusion between similar words
- Patterns in context misuse
- Learners' self-reported confidence in distinguishing synonyms

Results from both qualitative and quantitative data were then **triangulated** to provide a more comprehensive view of the phenomenon.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section presents both qualitative and quantitative findings on the challenges faced by Indonesian learners in distinguishing Korean adjective synonyms. The focus is on semantic nuances, usage contexts, and cultural connotations that make these adjectives difficult to acquire and apply appropriately. These findings are interpreted through the lens of psycholinguistic models of semantic processing and second language acquisition.

5.1. Qualitative Analysis of Synonym Pairs

Data 1	
아름답다 (areumdapda)	예쁘다 (yeppeuda)

The words 아름답다 (areumdapda) and 예쁘다 (yeppeuda) both have the basic meaning of "beautiful," but their usage differs based on context and nuance. 아름답다 is often used in formal or poetic situations, especially to describe abstract and noble beauty such as nature, art, or deep emotions. For example, this word is suitable for describing scenic landscapes or majestic works of art, and is therefore more commonly found in literature or formal speeches. On the other hand, 예쁘다 is more casual and familiar, used in everyday conversation to describe someone, an object, or an animal that is visually attractive with a warm and informal tone. This word choice not only reflects a difference in the level of formality but also reflects Korean cultural values, where the choice of words is very important for indicating politeness and social relationships. Indonesian learners often struggle to distinguish between these two words because in Indonesian, the word "cantik" does not have a similar context division. As a result, they tend to use the less appropriate word, such as using 아름답다 to compliment someone in informal conversation or 예쁘다 to describe the grand beauty of nature. Understanding this difference is crucial for learners to use the Korean language more accurately and naturally, as well as to grasp the cultural aspects embedded in the language.

Data 2	
행복하다 (haengbokhada)	즐겁다 (jeulgeopda)

The words 행복하다 (haengbokhada) and 즐겁다 (jeulgeopda) are both translated as "happy" in Indonesian,

but they have fundamental differences in the emotional context they express. 행복하다 refers to deep, long-lasting happiness, often emotional, and reflects a satisfying or meaningful life condition. This word is used to describe stable feelings of happiness, such as having a harmonious family or feeling content with life in general. In contrast, 즐겁다 is more related to temporary pleasure or joy, usually associated with specific experiences or activities. For example, this word is often used to describe the mood when doing something enjoyable, such as playing with friends or attending a party.

This difference highlights how the Korean language can express emotional nuances more specifically, which is often not found in Indonesian. In Indonesian, the word "bahagia" tends to be used generally without distinguishing between deep happiness and momentary joy. This can pose a challenge for Indonesian learners of Korean, as they must understand the subtle differences in emotional nuances conveyed by these two words. For example, using 행복하다 to describe a fleeting feeling, such as enjoying a meal, would sound inappropriate, while using 즐겁다 to describe deep happiness in life would also be incorrect. Understanding the context of using these two words not only helps learners use Korean more accurately but also provides insight into how the language reflects the rich emotional culture of Korea.

Data 3	
크다 (keuda)	높다 (nopda)

The words 크다 (keuda) and 높다 (nopda) are both translated as "big" or "tall," but they have different contexts of usage, particularly when describing objects or situations. 크다 (keuda) is used to describe the physical size of an object that is large or vast, without considering its height. For example, 크다 can be used to describe the size of a person's body, the size of a room, or large objects like a car or a table. This word focuses more on the width or length dimension of an object.

On the other hand, 높다 (nopda) is used to refer to height or something that is positioned high, such as a building, a mountain, or even a high-pitched sound. 높다 focuses more on vertical measurement, such as when describing how tall a building or mountain is. Additionally, 높다 is often used to describe high-pitched sounds or notes, for example, in the context of music or conversation.

This difference in usage is very important in the Korean language, because although both words mean "big" or "tall," the context of the object being described is different. For Indonesian learners, who may be more accustomed to using the words "tinggi" or "besar" more flexibly, it is crucial to understand that in Korean, the choice of word depends on the dimension of the object being discussed. Incorrect word choice can lead to confusion; for instance, using 크다 (keuda) to describe the height of a building would sound inappropriate, just as using 높다 (nopda) for the size of objects like a table or car would be incorrect.

Data 4	
차갑다 (chagapda)	시원하다 (siwonhada)

The words 차갑다 (chagapda) and 시원하다 (siwonhada) both relate to the sensation of coldness, but they are used in very different contexts. 차갑다 (chagapda) is used to describe something that is physically cold, such as water, objects, or very low temperatures. For example, 차갑다 can be used to describe an object that feels cold to the touch, like ice or metal exposed to cold air. Additionally, this word can be used metaphorically to describe a "cold" or unfriendly attitude or feeling, for instance, when someone behaves indifferently or is distant toward others.

On the other hand, 시원하다 (siwonhada) describes a refreshing or pleasant cold sensation. This word is often used to describe the refreshing feeling of cool air or cold drinks on a hot day. For example, we might say 시원하다 when feeling a cool breeze or drinking cold water on a hot day. In this context, 시원하다 not only means cold but also carries a positive connotation of freshness or comfort.

The main difference between these two words is that 차갑다 is more neutral and can even carry an unpleasant connotation (like the coldness of an object that feels uncomfortable), whereas 시원하다 is more related to comfort and refreshing coldness that is pleasant. Therefore, in certain situations, choosing the right word between the two is essential to convey the intended nuance. For instance, describing a cool, refreshing breeze would be more appropriate with 시원하다 than with 차갑다, which might sound less fitting in that context.

Data 5	
오래되다 (oraedoeda)	낡다 (nakda)

The word 오래되다 (oraedoeda) is used to describe something that has existed or occurred for a long time. This word does not carry a negative connotation. For example, 오래되다 is often used to describe objects or buildings that are old but still in good condition or have historical value. For instance, a historical building that has been around for a long time can be called 오래되다 without implying that it is bad or useless. It mainly emphasizes age or the duration of time rather than physical condition or quality.

On the other hand, 낡다 (nakda) is used to describe something that is old or worn out with a negative connotation. 낡다 refers to objects or things that have been used for a long time and have become damaged, outdated, or no longer function well. For example, shoes or clothes that are worn out and no longer fit for use can be called 낡다. This word implies that the item has lost its quality or function due to age or prolonged use. The main difference between these two words lies in the connotations each word carries. 오래되다 is more neutral and does not pass judgment on the condition of the object, while 낡다 emphasizes poor condition or deterioration. Therefore, 오래되다 is more commonly used in contexts involving objects with historical or sentimental value, while 낡다 is used to describe things that are no longer fit for use or are considered less valuable.

Data 6	
빠르다 (ppareuda)	이르다 (ireuda)

빠르다 (ppareuda) refers to physical speed or an activity performed quickly. This word is often used to describe fast movement, such as a vehicle or someone running, or an activity that happens quickly. Typically, 빠르다 carries a neutral or positive connotation, indicating efficiency or smoothness in carrying out something. An example of its usage is, "그는 매우 빠르다" (He is very fast), which could mean someone moves or works quickly.

On the other hand, 이르다 (ireuda) means "too fast" or "too early," referring to something happening before the right time or prematurely. 이르다 is more commonly used in a negative context to indicate that an action or decision was made too quickly, for instance, in a situation that is not yet ready. For example, "그는 너무 이르다" (He is too fast) could describe someone acting hastily or starting something before the right time.

The difference between 빠르다 and 이르다 lies in the context and nuance of their meanings. 빠르다 emphasizes speed in activity or movement, while 이르다 refers to something happening too quickly or earlier than desired, often with the connotation that the action is untimely.

Data 7	
똑똑하다 (ttokttokhada)	영리하다 (yeongrihada)

The words 똑똑하다 (ttokttokhada) and 영리하다 (yeongrihada) both translate to "smart" or "intelligent," but the difference lies in the context and type of intelligence they refer to.

똑똑하다 (ttokttokhada) refers to general intelligence or a person's intellectual ability, including the capacity to think logically, understand concepts, or learn quickly. This word is often used to describe someone who has broad knowledge or sharp thinking skills across various fields. For example, someone who can easily solve math problems or understand complex theories can be described as 똑똑하다.

On the other hand, 영리하다 (yeongrihada) refers to practical intelligence, meaning cleverness or the ability to handle specific situations, often related to making quick decisions or acting cleverly in difficult circumstances. This word tends to emphasize practicality and a person's ability to adapt or seize opportunities in everyday life. Someone who can find a way out of a challenging situation or use strategies to solve practical problems is often described as 영리하다.

Overall, the main difference between 똑똑하다 and 영리하다 lies in the type of intelligence: 똑똑하다 refers to intellectual or academic intelligence, while 영리하다 is more related to practical intelligence or cleverness in dealing with real-life situations.

Data 8	
기쁘다 (gippeuda)	행복하다 (haengbokhada)

기쁘다 (gippeuda) describes happiness or joy that is short-lived or temporary. This word is typically used to refer to feelings of pleasure that arise in specific situations, such as receiving good news or achieving a small accomplishment. The happiness implied here is usually light and does not last long, often related to a particular event or moment that brings a brief burst of joy.

On the other hand, 행복하다 (haengbokhada) refers to deeper, long-lasting happiness. This type of happiness is related to a sense of fulfillment and harmony in life as a whole, often connected to emotional stability and long-term satisfaction. It can encompass happiness in relationships, life achievements, or a more permanent and holistic sense of peace.

Thus, the main difference between 기쁘다 (gippeuda) and 행복하다 (haengbokhada) is that 기쁘다 refers to temporary happiness that arises in specific situations, while 행복하다 describes deeper, stable, and enduring happiness in life.

These adjectives are chosen because they have synonyms in Korean that are difficult for Indonesian learners to understand, particularly due to differences in context, culture, and nuance. Analyzing these words will help

learners better understand their usage context and provide insights into the importance of cultural understanding in language learning.

The qualitative data reveal consistent confusion across learners when selecting appropriate synonyms in Korean. For example, the pair 아름답다 (**areumdapda**) and 예쁘다 (**yeppeuda**) demonstrates how **contextual and emotional tone** influence lexical choice. Learners often misuse these due to the lack of equivalent contextual distinctions in Indonesian. This illustrates the **semantic processing difficulty** where learners must **map two near-synonyms in the target language onto a single general term in their native language**.

Similar patterns emerge in other adjective pairs:

- 행복하다 (**haengbokhada**) vs. 기쁘다 (**gippeuda**): Learners struggle with **temporal vs. enduring emotional states**, revealing limited **depth of vocabulary knowledge** (Laufer, 1997).
- 크다 (**keuda**) vs. 높다 (**nopda**): Learners confuse **horizontal vs. vertical dimensions**, highlighting gaps in **feature-based lexical encoding**.
- 차갑다 (**chagapda**) vs. 시원하다 (**siwonhada**): Learners are unaware of **pragmatic connotations**, which reflects challenges in **semantic priming and sociocultural association**.
- 똑똑하다 (**ttokttokhada**) vs. 영리하다 (**yeongrihada**): The difficulty in processing **abstract distinctions** in types of intelligence suggests a **higher cognitive load** due to conceptual complexity.

From a psycholinguistic viewpoint, these findings support the idea that synonym differentiation relies heavily on:

- **Lexical retrieval efficiency** from the mental lexicon (Levelt, 1989),
- **Contextual integration** in working memory (Baddeley, 2003),
- And the ability to process **fine-grained semantic distinctions**, which requires **automatized input recognition and storage in long-term memory**.

These processes are **taxing for working memory**, especially in L2 learners who are still forming stable lexical representations. This is especially evident when adjectives require **contextual reinterpretation**, such as interpreting 이르다 (**ireuda**) as "too early," not just "fast."

5.2. Quantitative Survey Findings
The results of the questionnaire (Table 1) support the qualitative observations:

Adjective Pair	% of Learners Who Struggled
오래되다 vs. 낡다	84%
크다 vs. 높다	75%
어두운 vs. 깜깜한	73%
빠르다 vs. 이르다	71%
아름답다 vs. 예쁘다	70%

Across all 10 adjective pairs, **the majority of learners selected "Yes"**, indicating difficulty in distinguishing meanings and contexts. The highest confusion was observed with 오래되다 (**oraedoeda**) vs. 낡다 (**nakda**), where learners struggled to distinguish **neutral aging** from **negative deterioration**—a distinction often implicit and culturally embedded in Korean. This confirms that learners experience **semantic overload** when processing **subtle evaluative connotations**, which may not exist in their native language.

Importantly, **abstract or metaphorical adjectives** (e.g., 똑똑하다 vs. 영리하다, 아프다 vs. 슬프다) tend to be more confusing than **concrete physical descriptors** (e.g., 차갑다 vs. 시원하다). This supports findings in second language acquisition research that **abstract concepts are acquired more slowly** due to their **high semantic density** and greater dependence on contextual inference.

5.3. Interpretation and Theoretical Implications
These results demonstrate that learners are not only translating words but also processing **layers of semantic, emotional, and cultural meaning**, which requires significant **cognitive effort**. According to **semantic network theory** (Collins & Loftus, 1975), successful vocabulary use depends on activating the correct node in a learner's mental lexicon and inhibiting near-synonymous competitors. Inaccurate synonym use suggests either **weak or overlapping network connections**, which is common in L2 learners with insufficient exposure to authentic input.

Moreover, from the perspective of **working memory theory** (Baddeley, 2003), learners must simultaneously hold and manipulate multiple word choices, connotations, and contexts. This high **intrinsic cognitive load** often leads to performance breakdowns, especially under real-time communication demands.

5.4. Pedagogical and Testing Implications
These findings have practical implications for **Korean language teaching and assessment**:

- **Curriculum Design**: Instruction should emphasize **deep vocabulary knowledge**, not just word-to-word translation. Teaching should include **contextual examples, contrastive analysis, and real-life dialogue practice**.
- **Material Development**: Textbooks and digital tools should provide explicit comparisons between synonyms, including their **emotional tone, usage situations, and pragmatic functions**.

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- **Language Proficiency Testing**: Current vocabulary tests may not sufficiently assess learners' **contextual sensitivity or pragmatic accuracy**. Testing instruments should integrate **situational vocabulary tasks** that measure learners' ability to choose context-appropriate synonyms under cognitive pressure.
- **Cognitive Strategy Training**: Teachers could implement **semantic mapping tasks** and **retrieval practice exercises** to strengthen lexical organization and reduce processing time.

CONCLUSION

This study has highlighted the complex challenges Indonesian learners face in mastering Korean synonyms, particularly adjectives with subtle distinctions in meaning, emotional nuance, and cultural context. Through the combined use of qualitative analysis and quantitative survey data, it was found that most learners struggle to differentiate between synonym pairs such as *아름답다* vs. *예쁘다* or *행복하다* vs. *기쁘다*, due to the lack of clear equivalents in their native language and limited exposure to authentic usage contexts.

These difficulties are not merely linguistic but also cognitive, involving processes such as semantic retrieval, working memory load, and contextual integration. Learners must select appropriate words from overlapping lexical fields, often under the influence of incomplete or ambiguous mappings from their first language. This reinforces the notion that vocabulary learning in second language acquisition—particularly with near-synonyms—is as much a psycholinguistic process as it is a linguistic one.

From a pedagogical perspective, these findings point to the necessity of context-rich, contrastive vocabulary instruction that helps learners develop deeper semantic awareness. Teachers should not only introduce new words but also guide students in understanding when, why, and how these words are appropriately used in real-world communication. From a language testing standpoint, the results suggest that conventional vocabulary tests may underestimate learners' challenges and should be complemented with pragmatic, context-sensitive assessments to better evaluate lexical proficiency.

In conclusion, helping learners navigate synonym usage in Korean requires a dual approach: enhancing their linguistic competence through structured exposure to contextual examples, and strengthening their cognitive processing abilities through targeted exercises. By doing so, educators can support more meaningful language acquisition that fosters both accuracy and cultural fluency, ultimately promoting learners' cross-cultural communication skills in a globalized world.

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