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Death, Taxes, and Language Change: The Inevitable Divergence of Korean Varieties as Spoken Worldwide

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Contemporary Korean Linguistics: International Perspectives
In Honor of Professor Sang-Oak Lee

edited by Robert J. Fouser

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Contemporary Korean Linguistics: International Perspectives

In Honor of Professor Sang-Oak Lee

이상억 교수 정년퇴임 기념 논문집

edited by Robert J. Fouser

Death, Taxes, and Language Change: The Inevitable Divergence of Korean Varieties as Spoken Worldwide*

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"In this world nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes."

-Benjamin Franklin

1. Introduction

Had the great American statesman taken a course in linguistics, he would have recognized that his famous epigram captured only two of life's three inevitabilities. We scholars of language know what is missing: "death, taxes, and language change." All languages change. Moreover, language change is all but certain when members of a speech community find themselves dispersed in geographically, politically, or socially non-contiguous areas. The effects of migration on language have perhaps been best documented and understood for Mr. Franklin's native tongue, English. Once limited to a small

* Many thanks to Professor Sang-Oak Lee for his many kindnesses over the years, particularly during the fall of 2004, during which time I had several occasions to visit with him while I was on leave in Seoul. Thanks, too, to all of my Korean colleagues and former students, official and unofficial alike (especially Dr. Jieun Lee, Dr. Younjeoung Choi, and Dr. Wenhua Jin), who have long put up with my lack of proficiency in their language and who, despite it all, have expressed their appreciation for my efforts and my research. What little I can offer through my work on the Korean language cannot begin to repay the debt I have incurred for many years of hospitality and encouragement I have received since my first visit to Korea in 1988.

collection of West Germanic tribes, English has become the world's most widely spoken tongue, having split into an array of national and sub-national varieties. Given the current hegemony of English in today's global marketplace, understanding how English (or differing "Englishes") functions as the primary medium of communication worldwide has given rise to an increasingly rich body of scholarship, including multiple books and articles with the phrase "World English" in the title. In one such book, *Cultures, Contexts, and World Englishes*, authors Kachru and Smith begin thus: "English is everywhere. At least it sometimes seems that way. ... The spread, status, and functions of English around the world are impressive indeed. In recorded human history no other language has had such a position" (2008:1). English is, without a doubt, a global language.

So how might Korean compare? When it comes to conceptualizing the notion of "World Koreans," there is less to say. Yes, there are multiple varieties of Korean spoken both on and off the Korean peninsula, each worthy of linguistic investigation. Thus, the notion of "multiple Koreans" is very much real. Yet compared to the parallel phenomenon in English, these "Koreans" are relatively young offspring of a common source. Spoken almost exclusively by those living on the Korean peninsula until the early 1900's, Korean has long been considered a "relatively homogeneous" language (Sohn 2001:12), with "no varieties or dialect ... so different that they cannot be understood by all" (Lee and Ramsey 2000:1). As such, our understanding of variation in Korean has been largely limited to *dialect* variation, and constrained by the strong standardizing forces of the established standard of Seoul and the surrounding region. Yet with the development of increasingly distinct and geographically separated Korean speech communities during the 20th century, it is unfathomable to believe that Korean could maintain the sort of grammatical homogeneity that it has been purported to possess.¹ There may no longer

¹ I say "purported" as I find it difficult to believe that Korean has ever been truly homogeneous. Languages don't behave that well. That said, my objective is neither to foment debate on the definition of "homogeneous" nor to upset esteemed colleagues whose prescriptively oriented views I acknowledge but respectfully

be a single "Korean" that subsumes all others.

In this essay, we consider the small but growing body of evidence that indicates how a collection of World Koreans exists during these earliest years of the 21st century, and use these facts as the foundation for a linguistic call to action to observe, describe, and explain the burgeoning linguistic variation found in Korean speech communities across the globe.

2. Koreans Near and Far

Any discussion of Korean language variation in the global context must necessarily begin with a brief overview of Korean migration patterns. At the nexus of today's Korean diaspora are the people and places of the Korean peninsula, long home to a nation characterized by ethnic, cultural, and linguistic homogeneity. Politically beholden for centuries to its more powerful neighbor to the north, Korea has been influenced by Chinese culture, having adapted a version of Confucian social structure that permeates all social spheres, and having integrated into its language a large body of Chinese-based lexical items. Indeed, according to sources such as Lee and Ramsey (2000) and Sohn (2001), some 60% of the Korean lexicon derives from Chinese. Nevertheless, the language's grammatical structures have long remained uninfluenced by external forces. At its phonological and morphosyntactic core, Korean is inarguably Korean.

Korea's cultural and linguistic homogeneity is consistent with a history of limited migration. Aside from groups of Korean speakers who ventured northward beyond Tumen and Yalu Rivers prior to the late 1800's, Korean emigration remained relatively low until Korea was annexed by Japan in 1910. By the beginning of World War II, larger numbers of Koreans had migrated to northeast China. There were also movements of Korean people into the former Soviet Union during the latter part of the 19th century and

challenge. Rather, I want to inspire younger scholars to address the empirically verifiable realities of the present and look to the future.

into the first third of the 20th century. During the Stalin regime, however, more than 180,000 Koreans were forcibly relocated to various Central Asian Soviet republics, predominantly Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan (King 1987, Pak 1991). The political opening of Korea to the West in the late 19th century brought the beginning of emigration to western nations. These people movements were all rather modest in size and scope as compared to what would transpire during the early and middle parts of the 20th century, when sizeable numbers of Koreans were displaced to Japan. The number of Koreans living in Japan peaked at nearly 2 million in 1944 and then dropped sharply soon thereafter to a relatively stable 600,000 during the latter half of the 20th century.

Then, in 1945, came the greatest separation of Korean-speaking peoples in history: the division of Korea. Not only were those in the South separated from their compatriots in the North, but the profound isolating policies of the northern regime further separated South Koreans from what was essentially a third Korean "sub-state" in Asia, that of the Korean-speaking populations in China's Jilin, Heilongjiang, and Liaoning provinces. Add to this separation an increasing trend toward emigration by South Koreans to the United States, Canada, Australia, and elsewhere, and the net effect is clear: one finds populations of Korean people around the world, populations that, for over three generations, have been separated by an array of communicative barriers, some geographic, others political. According to J. Lee (2001), citing data from the Korean Ministry of Justice, this population includes some 5.65 million "overseas Koreans," over 90% of whom live in either China, the United States, Japan, and the successor states of the former Soviet Union (including Russia). With this separation has come a reduction in the communicative density among many of these communities, and - one can reasonably surmise - an increased likelihood of linguistic divergence.

3. The Emergence of Differing Varieties of Korean

Since the mid 1900's, there has developed a significant literature on the

various types of Korean spoken in Asia, including those varieties associated with communities living in South Korea, North Korea, China, Russia, and Central Asia. These materials, too large in number to enumerate exhaustively here, help us to understand the emergence of different localized norms – some official, others not – with an arguably narrow emphasis on vocabulary and orthography. Scholars such as Sohn, for example, have written about ways in which North Korean agencies have “replaced thousands of Chinese character-based words with newly coined native words while using many ideology-laden expressions” (2001:12). Such changes are consistent with North’s ideology of *juche* (“self-reliance”), thereby moving north Koreans toward more deliberate expressions of their cultural uniqueness and socialist ideology. Perhaps most well-known among such language policies is the 1949 edict requiring North Korean publications to employ only Korean script, *hangeul*.

In China, attention has been given to establishing linguistic norms for the Korean minority, first in terms of adopting those associated with Pyongyang, and later in terms of establishing independent, local policies for the language (Tai 2004). In Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia, one finds discussions of how speakers employ forms associated with the northeastern Hamgyeong dialect. Pak (1991:618) remarks how “divergences among the subdialects are insignificant and do not hinder communication.” King’s 1987 and 1992 accounts of Soviet Korean bring to light a number of phonetic and phonological differences with the Seoul variety, including the surface relations of the liquid /ㄹ/, a velar nasal weakening process, a “productive process of umlaut” (1987:257), the development of a word-initial [v] (1992:204) and a host of morphological and lexical differences, some of which are clearly reflexes of contact with the Russian-speaking superstratum.

While there are occasional mentions of the speech patterns associated with these various types of Korean, little is said about phonetic or phonological innovation. Moreover, phonetic details are meager and acoustic measurements are absent. Underlying this apparent gap in the literature is a tacit assumption that above and beyond the traditional dialects, there exists a superordinate

standard language that remains relatively immune to substantive change over time. Yet given the fifty-plus years since the *de facto* end of the United Nations' peacekeeping action in Korea, along with the subsequent ebb and flow of political policies and economic shifts in the region, is it reasonable to assume that the Korean language as spoken in sites as geographically and politically distant as Seoul, Pyongyang, Yanbian, and Los Angeles has not changed? One could hardly think so. Indeed, Cho (1991) has acknowledged the widening gap between the languages of South and North Korea, writing of the "current linguistic divergence between the standard languages of divided Korea," and providing suggestions for how the matter might be addressed. Of particular note is the underlying assumption that the documented changes should, at some point, be undone: "The geopolitical unification of the country may facilitate the task of restoring linguistic homogeneity. The more quickly Korea may be geopolitically unified, the more quickly may linguistic homogeneity be restored" (1991:155). Here, again, the dominant trope is that of a single, uniform conceptualization of Korean.

But what would it mean to refer to a "changed" Korean language, or to multiple "Koreans"? In a brief summary of differences between the northern and southern varieties, Nikol'sky (1991:615) remarks that "No matter how deep they are, the linguistic changes occurred separately in the two parts of the country have resulted in divergent features which, if they continue to accumulated, can cause mutual misunderstanding." Nikol'sky's comment is noteworthy in that it begs this question: exactly how many "divergent features" must be "accumulated" before one can reasonably posit the existence of two historically related but distinct languages? In terms of the definition attributed to Max Weinreich we might ask, "What is the difference between a language and a dialect?" Were the answer as simple as "an army and a navy," (and, I would add, "...and a flag"), then we would have asserted the establishment of two different "Koreans" in the summer of 1945. One realizes, however, that the situation is not so straightforward. Languages are not merely reflections of politics. Nevertheless, politics often plays a role in establishing the conditions under which a speech community can become

divided and their language(s) increasingly different. As linguists, we are charged with documenting and explaining these phenomena.

4. Phonetic and Phonological Divergence in Korean Speech Varieties

In the sections that follow, we consider a subset of those speech characteristics for which there is evidence of potentially significant changes among varieties of Korean: 1) the status of the Korean front vowels, unrounded /i e ε/ and rounded /y ø/; and 2) shifts in the degree of aspiration associated with the three types of obstruents, i.e., lax vs. aspirated vs. tense.

4.1. Disclaimer

Before pressing forward, it is imperative to understand that the assessment provided here is in no way comprehensive; there is a bias toward those speech phenomena that I, the author, am most familiar with and understand best. Such a bias emerges from a series of factors that constrain my ability to take on a project as enormous as gathering, organizing, and reporting upon the extant literature on all varieties of Korean spoken worldwide today. In my case, these factors include insufficient proficiency in many of the source languages to read much of the literature with facility or speed, as well as insufficient resources of both time and money to conduct the far-reaching fieldwork necessary to document the facts, which would then test the claims made in the literature. This latter point - the need to conduct more fieldwork on Korean - is particularly important in light of the ever-changing extra-linguistic circumstances that surround each of the relevant speech communities in diaspora.

4.2. Varying Inventories of Front Vowels

Traditional Korean grammars, hewing closely to prescriptive norms as encoded by the standard orthography, indicate that there are five front vowels in the language, three unrounded - /i/ ㅣ, /e/ ऐ, and /ɛ/ 어 - and two rounded - /y/ 위 and /ø/ 외. In many varieties of the language, however, this system of five front vowels has been reduced to as few as two.

/ə/ versus /ɛ/. In the case of the front unrounded vowels, there is evidence that of a merger of the lower two segments (/e/ and /ɛ/) in Seoul speech, thereby reducing what was once a three-way contrast to a simpler [+high] vs. [-high] distinction. Reference to a merger is made by various authors, including Choo and O'Grady (2003), citing accounts of Martin (1992), Sohn (1994), and Lee (1995). Choo and O'Grady write: "The contrast between -ㅐ and -ㅓ has all but disappeared in contemporary Korean, and most speakers pronounce the two sounds alike, more or less as -ㅓ. Nonetheless, the distinction is still maintained in initial syllables by a few speakers, especially in careful speech..." (p. 11). A more recent presentation by Silva and Jin (2008), based on acoustic data from an age-stratified sample of speakers living in the Seoul area, asserts that the merger of /e/ and /ɛ/ is, in fact, complete for most speakers.²

What of this merger in other varieties of Korean? Given the dearth of systematic sociolinguistic studies on this particular topic, it is difficult to know. Recent studies of Korean as spoken in China, however, suggest that the /e/-/ɛ/ distinction is alive and well. Jin (2008), for example, reports that for Korean speakers in Shenyang, the two segments remain distinct. Silva and Jin (2006) likewise indicate that Korean speakers interviewed in Beijing

² The small percentage of participants in this study who presented distinct pronunciations for /e/ and /ɛ/ are hypothesized to be adherents to a prescriptive norm that, for the vast majority, carries little popular force. An analogous case in North American English: the prescriptive maintenance of a distinction between voiced *w* and voiceless aspirated *wh* (e.g., *witch* ~ *which*) by a minority of American English speakers.

in the fall of 2004 (all of whom were from Jilin province) also differentiate the two.

The status of /ɥ/ and /ø/. As for the front rounded vowels, one finds discrepant accounts in the literature. The most conservative stance states that Korean includes both [+high] and [-high] front rounded vowels, /y/ and /ø/, thus creating parallel structure with their unrounded counterparts /i/ and /e/, as well as contributing to a larger phonological symmetry:

(1)	front		back	
	rounded	unrounded	rounded	unrounded
[+high]	ɥ y	ɪ i	ʊ u	ʊ ü
[-high]	ø	e	o	ö
[+low]		ɛ		a

The parallelism inherent in this vowel inventory proves useful in specific accounts of vowel harmony (a moribund process in the language), sound symbolism (mimetics), and other phonological processes (Ahn 2004: 54). The question remains, however, as to whether this system finds currency in all varieties of modern Korean. Doubt arises when one considers the range of treatments given /y/ and /ø/. Martin (1992:24), for example, posits mid front rounded /ø/ but relegates ɥ to the group of “complex nuclei” (i.e., /wi/). Similarly, W-J Kim notes that “among conservative speakers in the central district we notice ö ... It would be proper that there exists ü to form a pair with ö in the system of vowels... However, it is not easy to find one who has the vowel ü” (1983:159-160). Ahn (2004:54) is more confident about the phonemic status of a monophthongal /ø/ but equivocates a bit regarding /y/: “The phonemic status of this sound [rendered as /ü/] is rather controversial as it varies with the diphthong [wi].” Nevertheless, he ultimately assumes the existence of both front rounded segments as part of the underlying system. C-W Kim (1988/1967:453) presents ɥ as a diphthong but ø as a monophthong – sort of: “[ø] is the only ‘pure’ front-rounded vowel... most Koreans substitute [ø] by [we] (or by [e]) freely... I regard therefore [ø] and [we] as constituting

the one and the same systematic phoneme [we]..." Lee and Ramsey (2000:64) acknowledge the complexity of the matter thus:

The monophthongs ... represent a kind of ideal system. These phonetic values are maintained, to be sure, by many speakers of the central, Kyōnggi area around Seoul. But, in some cases, other pronunciations are more common. In particular, the compilers of "Standard Pronunciation" [referring to the 표준 발음법 of 1989] recognized that /wi/ (위) and /oy/ (외) can also be pronounced as the diphthongs [wi] and [we] and added a proviso to that effect. In actuality, these two diphthong values are heard much more often than the equivalent monophthongs.

In listening to the speech of contemporary Seoul speakers, one finds no clear evidence of *any* front rounded vowels: they seem to have been replaced by /wi/ and /we/. For example, Choo and O'Grady (2003:15-16) categorize these segments as "'w' diphthongs," making no mention of their roots as front rounded monophthongs. There is no doubt that something has changed.

Jin's 2008 account of the front rounded vowels in Shenyang, however, paints a more complex picture. While Jin argues that ㅜ has been rendered a diphthong [we] in the speech of all of her subjects, the status of ㅟ, with its four surface variants of [y], [yi], [i] and [u], is perhaps best viewed as an underlying monophthong /y/. Most intriguing about Jin's account is that the variants of underlying /y/ are conditioned by extralinguistic factors such as age and prestige. Moreover, the extent to which the maintenance of a high front rounded vowel in the speech of Shenyang speakers is a language-internal phenomenon or one fostered (or, perhaps, "pressured") by the existence of a similar vowel in Modern Standard Chinese remains to be better understood. There is, without a doubt, more fieldwork to be done.

4.3. Changes in Patterns of Obstruent Aspiration

One of the hallmarks of the Korean consonant inventory is the distinction among three types of non-continuant obstruents:

(2)	LABIAL	CORONAL		DORSAL
	bilabial	dento-alveolar	(alveo-)palatal	velar
lax (plain)	ㅍ p	ㅌ t	ㅊ c	ㅋ k
aspirated	ㅍᄉ ph	ㅌᄉ th	ㅊᄉ ch	ㅋᄉ kh
tense (reinforced)	ㅍᄢ pp	ㅌᄢ tt	ㅊᄢ cc	ㅋᄢ kk

In phrase-initial position, these segments are associated with varying degrees of relative post-release aspiration (or differing lengths of Voice Onset Time, VOT): aspirated segments are heavily aspirated, tense segments bear negligible aspiration, and lax segments manifest aspiration values that fall in between. The three categories further differentiate themselves by behaving differently in intervocalic contexts, with lax segments becoming voiced (at least partially so), aspirated segments losing aspiration, and tense segments presenting a longer period of stop closure with no changes in voicing or aspiration. What one observes, then, is that these three categories (lax vs. aspirated vs. tense) are consistently mapped to three distinct phonetic categories.³

As has been recognized since the mid 1960's (e.g., C-W Kim 1965), aspiration/VOT is not the only characteristic associated with the three phonation classes. Among other phonetic markers are differences in the fundamental frequency (F-zero) of the vowel immediately following the stop. As noted by Han and Weitzman (1970), Silva (1998, 2006), and others, the F-zero of a vowel following lax obstruent tends to be lower (or rising) as compared

³ In syllable-final position, phonation distinctions are neutralized, with segments in each of the major place categories reducing to corresponding unreleased stops.

to the F-zero of a vowel following an aspirated or tense segment. In fact, Choo and O'Grady (2003:24) use this characteristic to guide language learners who are working on the tense vs. lax distinction: "One way to tell that you are pronouncing the ㅈ correctly is to listen to the pitch on the vowel that follows. If your pronunciation is right, the pitch should be slightly higher than after ㅊ ."

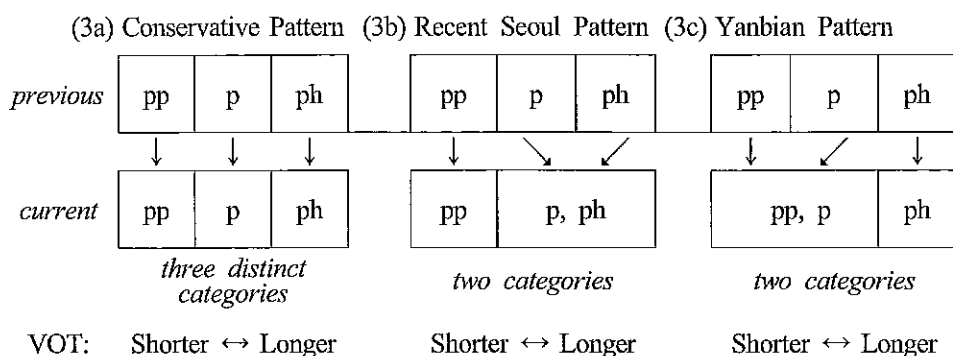
When comparing data from varieties of Korean spoken today, however, one finds evidence of changes in the phonetic realizations of these segments, particularly in phrase-initial position. Silva 2006 advances the claim that in the speech of younger speakers of Korean, there is no longer a VOT difference between lax and aspirated stops in initial position. These two phonemic categories have not merged, however, as they are now differentiated in terms of the F-zero patterns of the following vowel: aspirated consonants are associated with higher F-zero values and lax with lower. In her sociolinguistic study of Shenyang Korean, Jin (2008) finds similar shifts in VOT. These findings find further confirmation in neurolinguistic research on Korean speakers of differing ages by Park and Iverson (2008:17):

Speakers of Seoul Korean for whom VOT is no longer the chief differentiator between lax and aspirated stops were found to be activating two pitch-related areas of the brain ... [F]or them the f_0 differences in the following vowel between the two stop types are significant, or phonemic. On the other hand, speakers who continue to maintain a substantial VOT difference between lax and aspirated stops, and who also show similar pitch differentiation in the vowel following, do not activate both pitch-related areas of the brain, indicating that for them the f_0 variation is still redundant, or non-phonemic. The fMRI results reported here thus confirm the mental category distinctions implied by Silva's acoustic observations and undergird the emergent development of pitch sensitivity in the Korean laryngeal system.

Complicating the picture of VOT variation in Korean are the results of

a study by Zheng and Li (2005 as reported in Jin 2008), in which Korean speakers from the Yanbian Autonomous Region were also found to minimize “traditional” VOT differences, but in this case, between lax and tense stops: in Yanbian Korean, VOT associated with lax segments is, on average, less than 15 msec, akin to the mean VOT of their tense counterparts. For these speakers, VOT serves only to differentiate aspirated obstruents from their non-aspirated counterparts, reducing three categories to two. Whether other acoustic characteristics such as F-zero are playing a role in maintaining phonemic distinctions between domain initial lax and tense stops in the Yanbian variety remains to be understood.

In terms of how VOT manifests itself in each of the three stop types in phrase-initial position, it would appear that we have evidence for three surface-level patterns. The first is the traditional, conservative system (3a). The second, found among younger speakers of the standard language, finds overlapping VOT values for lax and aspirated segments (3b). The third, evidenced in Yanbian, presents overlapping VOT values for the lax and tense (3c), a pattern also found in the earliest acoustic work on this topic by C-W Kim (1965).



What is clear in these few examples of VOT variation in contemporary Korean is that change is afoot in the language, and this change is not necessarily consistent from one speech community to the next. One further anticipates

that there are Korean speech communities in which VOT shifts have not yet occurred (or are not currently occurring), thereby preserving the *status quo* (pattern 3a). And lest one underestimate the power of this *status quo*, one need only locate any recently published textbook on Korean and witness how traditional descriptions for tense, aspirated and lax obstruents as being unaspirated, heavily aspirated, and moderately aspirated persist. H-B Lee's text on standard pronunciation (한국어의 표준발음) indicates the following (1998:109):

그러므로 한국어에서는 초성의 위치에서 파열음이 삼중적인 음운대립을 보이고 있는데, 이들의 음성적 특질을 간추리면 아래와 같다.

/b/ (ㅂ), /d/ (ㄷ), /g/ (ㄱ):	무성, 무기 (약한 유기) 이완음
/ph/ (ㅍ), /th/ (ㅌ), /kh/ (ㅋ):	무성, 유기음
/p/ (ㅃ), /t/ (ㄸ), /k/ (ㄲ):	무성, 무기, 긴장음

Thus in Korean, we find a three-way phonemic opposition for stops in initial position. When we summarize their phonetic characteristics, they look like those below:

/b/ (ㅂ), /d/ (ㄷ), /g/ (ㄱ):	voiceless, unaspirated (lightly aspirated), lax
/ph/ (ㅍ), /th/ (ㅌ), /kh/ (ㅋ):	voiceless, aspirated
/p/ (ㅃ), /t/ (ㄸ), /k/ (ㄲ):	voiceless, unaspirated, tense

The authors of *Teaching Korean Pronunciation* (2003) make use of traditional accounts in their cross-linguistic comparisons of Korean and English stops (Han et al. 2003:14):

한국어의 /ㅍ, ㅌ, ㅋ/는 영어의 /p, t, k/와 음성적으로 매우 유사하기 때문에 영어권 학습자들은 한국어의 /ㅍ, ㅌ, ㅋ/를 영어의 /p, t, k/로 대체해서 발음한다. 반면 영어의 /b, d, g/는 평음인 점에서 한국어의 /ㅂ, ㄷ, ㄱ/와 비슷하지만 무기음이라는 점에서는 /ㅃ, ㄸ, ㄲ/와 비슷하기 때문에 대부분 영어권 학습자들이 한국어의 /ㅂ, ㄷ, ㄱ/와 /ㅃ, ㄸ, ㄲ/를 구별해서 발음하지 못한다.

Because Korean /ㅍ, ㅌ, ㅋ/ are very phonetically similar to English /p, t, k/ Anglophone learners pronounce /ㅍ, ㅌ, ㅋ/ by replacing them with /p, t, k/. On the other hand, English /b, d, g/ are similar to Korean /ㅂ, ㄸ, ㄱ/ in terms of their laxness, but in terms of their lack of aspiration, they are similar to Korean /ㅃ, ㄲ, ㅋ/ hence, most Anglophone learners cannot pronounce Korean /ㅂ, ㄸ, ㄱ/ and /ㅃ, ㄲ, ㅋ/ differently.

It would be dishonest to suggest that the power of the prescriptive norm holding sway over empirically-verified reality is unique to the Korean case. It is not. Indeed, standard descriptions of English continue to perpetuate the notion that the operative distinction between *p~b*, *t~d*, and *k~g* is voicing and not, as one might otherwise argue, aspiration. (See Iverson and Salmons 1995 for such an account for Germanic languages, including English.) In any community one must grapple with important questions germane to the process and production of language change: How might we know that a change is in process? When is the change complete? How might it have shifted our sense of what is contrastive? What is no longer phonemic? If the community's writing system is linked to phonological categories (as is clearly the case in Korean), what are the ramifications for the orthography? How might we respond to these shifting relationships? These sorts of questions merit the type of research that can provide responses informed by field data drawn from multiple groups of speakers and in varying contexts.

5. A Call to Action

There is no doubt that the Korean language has enjoyed considerable attention by members of the community of language scholars working both in Korea and elsewhere. It is worth noting, however, that the much of the existing literature focuses on understanding Korean within contemporary theoretical linguistic frameworks and takes as a point of departure the

existence of a common, standard grammar, one that might reflect Chomsky's ideal speaker-hearer relationship. Moreover, a summary of database searches indicates a strong bias toward Korean language research that has no presumed connection to sociolinguistic or variationist approaches.

Table 1: Frequency of Korean Language References in Several Online Databases

In each case, the pairs "Korean and X" were queried using appropriate truncation (e.g., "phonolog*") to select variants such as "phonology" and "phonological", and in a broad domain appropriate to each database (e.g., all keywords). The data were sampled on Wednesday, May 27, 2009.

"Korean and..."	MLA International Bibliography		Linguistics and Language Behavior Abstracts!		Linguistics Abstracts Online		J-Stor*	
Synta*	787	20%	1210	32%	167	18%	63	5%
Semantic*	288	7%	840	22%	161	17%	35	3%
Phonolog*	331	8%	697	19%	156	17%	57	5%
Morpholog*	203	5%	436	12%	76	8%	29	2%
Phonetic*	131	3%	398	11%	77	8%	26	2%
Sociolinguistic*	43	1%	171	5%	15	2%	3	<1%
Variation*	30	1%	188	5%	60	6%	22	2%
Dialect*	85	2%	183	5%	32	3%	7	1%
Sociolinguistic*	43	1%	171	5%	15	2%	3	<1%
"Korean" alone:	3903	100%	3756	100%	926	100%	1,252	100%

!In this column, n represents "all publication types," including journal, peer-reviewed journals, books, and chapters/essays.

*In this column, "Korean" was searched in the full text while the second terms were searched only in the abstract. Searches were limited to those 15 journals classified under "linguistics."

What, then, needs to be done? To begin, the body of linguistic literature on Korean would benefit tremendously from new descriptions of the various "Koreans" spoken on and off the peninsula, thereby providing an updated corpus out of which can emerge subsequent analysis and comparison. Central

to this effort must be a willingness for researchers to step out of the formidable prescriptive shadow of the standard and let each of these varieties speak in its own voice, autonomously. The National Institute of the Korean Language, on its website, reports efforts with regard to understanding more fully the range of possibilities manifested in how Korean is spoken on the peninsula, as well as in China and Central Asia. I look forward to learning more about the results of these studies.

Next, it is imperative to acknowledge fully the sociolinguistic contexts in which these global Koreans exist, including the role that the dominant culture and language. For example, as Tai writes, "China's Korean has been spoken in China for over 100 years. Through the contact with and influence by the Chinese language and culture, its cultural content changed a lot more than its linguistics forms" (2004:301). For our purposes, the critical notion here is the implication that there *have* been changes to linguistic forms – changes that need to be systematically documented (in each of the major Korean-language populations in China) and then put into the appropriate contexts. Is a particular phenomenon attributable to influence from the superstrate language? Or might it be a case of a linguistic innovation taking place wholly (or primarily) within the Korean context? How do such changes compare to those found in other Korean, including – but not limited to – the traditional standard?

In our efforts to gather the necessary data, time is of the essence. There is a pressing need for studies that address matters of bilingualism, language shift, and language transfer in Korean communities worldwide, lest the numbers of native Korean speakers in areas as diverse as northeast China, Japan, Uzbekistan, and the United States drop below levels sufficient for self-sustenance. As the percentage of Koreans abroad claiming proficiency in Korean decreases (as is the case in China), opportunities to capture the necessary speech data likewise diminish.

I close with the words of my student, Wenhua Jin, who writes, "Research on variation and change of Chinese Korean [and, I would add, all types of

Korean - DJS] is still in its infancy, and any future systematic study on this topic, and other topics as well, would contribute tremendously to its growth, thereby contributing to the understanding of overall picture of Korean language change and development" (2008:41). I heartily agree, and add that we must look to incorporate all types of Korean spoken worldwide. So let us take ourselves out onto the field, armed with our knowledge and skills, our digital recording devices, and our desire to document extent to which this purportedly homogeneous language has taken root and bloomed in new ways in new places.

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