

Heewon Jung

## Korea's linguistic policies: Status and challenges

### Abstract (English)

In Korea, most people are monolingual Korean speakers. In the early 20th century, under Japanese colonial rule, Korean lost its position as the primary language, but it became Korea's official language again after liberation from Japanese colonialism. Now, both North and South Korea recognise Korean as the only official language and *Hangeul*, the Korean alphabet, as the only official alphabet. However, in policy terms, it is important to understand the linguistic differences caused by the division of Korea, and to prepare for linguistic unification. Since the 1990s, Korean language education for foreigners has also emerged as an important policy issue.

This presentation reviews Korea's language policies over the last 70 years since liberation, reflecting on the changes in the linguistic environment, and identifies future challenges and directions for language policies.

### Abstract (Korean)

정희원(국립국어원)

한국은 대부분의 사람들이 한국어 하나만을 사용하는 나라이다. 20세기 초 일본의 식민 지배를 받는 동안 한국어는 제1언어의 지위에서 밀려났으나, 광복 이후 다시 공용어의 위치를 되찾았다. 한국의 언어정책은 한글 사용과도 관련이 깊다. 한글은 1443년에 세종대왕이 창제하였으나, 1980년대 후반부터 비로소 한국어를 표기하는 유일한 문자로 인정받게 되었다. 남한과 북한은 모두 한국어를 유일한 공용어로, 한글을 유일한 공식 문자로 사용하고 있지만 분단에 따른 언어적 차이를 조사하고 언어 통일에 대비하는 것은 중요한 정책적 과제 중 하나이다.

1990년대 이후 한국어는 새로운 상황에 처하게 된다. 국외에서는 한국어를 배우고자 하는 외국인이 늘어나고, 국내에서는 외국인 노동자와 국제결혼으로 인한 이민자가 증가함으로써 외국인을 위한 한국어 교육이 중요한 정책 과제로 등장하게 되었다.

이 발표에서는 이러한 언어 환경을 바탕으로 광복 이후 지난 70여년 간 진행된 한국의 언어정책 현황에 대해 살펴보고, 언어정책이 앞으로 나아갈 방향과 과제를 모색해 보고자 한다.

## 1. Introduction: Korea's language status

Korea is more or less a monolingual country. It is true that the Korean language was dislodged from its status as the primary language during Japanese colonial rule from 1910 to 1945, and the language was not been taught in schools during the later stages of that rule. However, Korean reclaimed its title as the official

language of Korea after independence from Japan and despite the separation of Korea into South Korea and North Korea, both use Korean as their sole official language.

Korea's linguistic policies are closely intertwined with the use of Hangeul. Letter policies constitute a key objective of linguistic policies in many countries, including Mongolia, Malaysia and Turkey. Similarly, there had been long, drawn-out disputes over the use of letters in Korea. Although Hangeul was created by King Sejong in 1443, it was only at the end of the 1980s that it became a full-fledged official language across the board, including the public sector. Despite a flurry of disputes, Hangeul is now recognized as the exclusive alphabet in which to write the Korean language.

Since the 1990s, Korea has faced an unprecedented surge in demand for learning Korean at home and abroad. Internationally, the number of foreigners seeking to learn Korean for economic or cultural reasons has increased considerably, while internally, the number of foreign workers and foreign immigrant women married to a Korean spouse has also grown substantially. In particular, debates on multi-culturalism have emerged in Korea, which was previously perceived by its people as a monoethnic and monolingual nation. As such, teaching Korean as a foreign language has emerged as one of the most important policy objectives.

Meanwhile, there has been a boom in Koreans learning English amid an ever-increasing interest in globalisation in the aftermath of the 1997 Asian financial crisis, and some people even went so far as to argue that English should become the official language of Korea. Fortunately, this controversial debate was soon put to rest. Since then, however, companies have increased their use of English, colleges have encouraged lecturers to teach in English and students to write their theses in English, and some private elementary schools and kindergartens have initiated English engagement education. Against this backdrop, it is essential to strengthen the teaching of English to enhance proficiency in English among Koreans, while at the same time promoting the continued development of the Korean language to prevent English from threatening the sustainability of Hangeul.

This paper seeks to introduce the status of Korean linguistic policies against this backdrop. It will identify the linguistic policies that have prevailed for the last seven decades since liberation from Japan, and explore the future direction and challenges in order to respond to changing linguistic environments.

## **2. Policy making institutions and legal grounds**

Linguistic policies are interwoven with state education, as they are mostly implemented in schools. From the time the government was established until 1989, Korea did not have any organisation or departments dedicated to linguistic policies. Instead, the Text Book Compilation Bureau of the Ministry of Culture and Edu-

cation, charged with the publication and compilation of educational literature, was responsible for linguistic policies. In the course of producing textbooks, the Bureau gave interpretations for orthography and standard language, promoted the exclusive use of Hangeul in textbooks, and ran campaigns to refine the Korean language. Thus, it was difficult for any linguistic policies to be implemented under a consistent directive with a high level of linguistic expertise.

Following governmental reorganisation, the Ministry of Culture (now the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism) was set up in Korea, and Korean linguistic policies came under its remit. The Ministry had a Language Bureau (now the Korean Language Policy Bureau) charged with formulating and implementing linguistic policies, as well as an affiliated institution, the National Institute of Korean Language Research (now the National Institute of the Korean Language, “NIKL”), to conduct research for policy formulation. In addition, it has a non-permanent deliberation organisation, the “Korean Language Deliberation Council”, an advisory body directly reporting to the Minister of Culture which consists of language experts from academic and industrial spheres who deliberate on key issues relating to the Korean language.

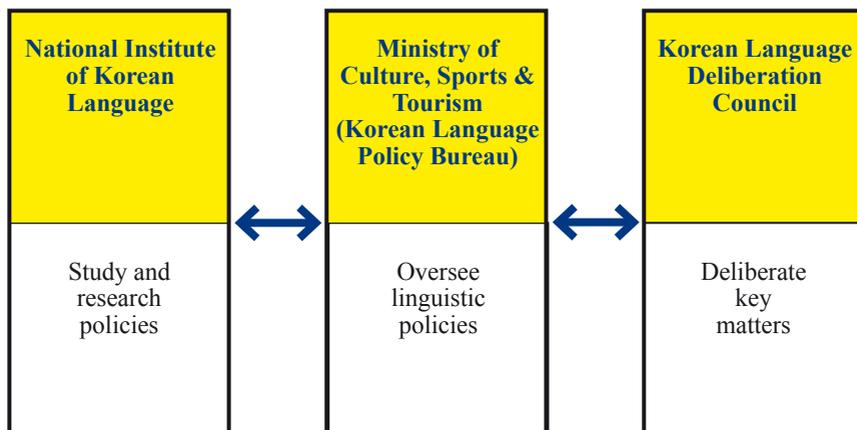


Fig. 1

The Framework Act on the Korean Language currently constitutes the legal basis for Korea's linguistic policies. While there were a few laws dealing with matters relating to the Korean language and characters prior to the enforcement of the Framework Act – including the Exclusive Usage of Hangeul Act and the Culture and Arts Promotion Act – there was no law or regulation overseeing all spheres of linguistic policy. Thus, the Framework Act on the Korean Language was introduced on July 28, 2005 to “enhance the quality of people's cultural lifestyle and contribute to the development of Korean ethnic culture by encouraging the use of

the Korean language and establishing the foundation for the development and conservation of the Korean language". The Framework Act is highly significant in that it has provided the legal basis for all Korean linguistic policies and research, producing basic frameworks for Korean learning and disseminating the Korean language.

Article	Details
3	The Korean language shall be the official language of the Republic of Korea.
6	The Minister of Culture, Sports & Tourism shall establish and implement Basic Plans for Korean Language Development every five years for development and dissemination of the Korean language.
8	Annual reports on the results of establishing and implementing policies for Korean language development and dissemination shall be submitted to the National Assembly every two years.
9	The transparency and reliability of Korean linguistic policies shall be enhanced. The Minister of Culture, Sports & Tourism shall enable the ministry to collect data and perform research on the public awareness, proficiency, language use environment, etc. required to formulate appropriate Korean linguistic policies, to respond to changes in the language environment and to improve the perception of the Korean language.
10	Korean Language Officer System shall be introduced in public institutions to oversee the promotion of the Korean language.
12	The Basic Plans & Action Plans for Development of the Korean Language shall be implemented and their achievements shall be assessed. Also, Policies for Improving the Language Environment and Language Proficiency Programs shall be developed to enhance the validity of linguistic policies. The Minister of Culture, Sports and Tourism shall assess the impact of language norms on the people's use of the Korean language, practicality and rationality of language norms, and other factors and then reflect the outcomes thereof in policies.
14	Public institutions shall draft their documents in Hangeul.
15	The mass media should make efforts to contribute to a correct use of the Korean language.
17	The government shall standardize, systemize and disseminate terminologies and jargons of each sector for the public to use the language with ease and convenience.
19	Those teaching the Korean language to overseas Koreans and foreigners shall be given certain qualifications.

Article	Details
23	The Minister of Culture, Sports and Tourism may examine Korean language aptitude to improve the people's Korean language aptitude and establish creative use of language.
24	The Minister of Culture, Sports and Tourism may designate as centers for Korean language and culture, specialized institutions or organizations related to the Korean language or institutions annexed to schools so as to enhance the Korean language aptitude of the people and provide consultation related to the Korean language.

Table 1: Key details of the Framework Act on the Korean Language

### 3. Status of Korea's linguistic policies

#### 3.1 Policies on the use of Korean letters

The most important landmark in the history of the Korean language is the creation of Hangeul (then known as “Hunminjeongeum”, meaning the “Proper Sounds for the Education of the People”). The fourth king of the Joseon Dynasty, King Sejong, completed Hangeul in 1443, tested it for three years and promulgated it in 1446. Prior to the creation of Hangeul, common people had remained largely illiterate. At that time, most writing was in Classical Chinese (“hanja”), which was compliant with the Chinese grammatical system, alongside native phonetic writing systems. The lower classes had considerable difficulty in learning how to write using Chinese characters, so reading and writing had been largely confined to elites and nobilities. Even after the creation of Hangeul, Chinese characters dominated official documents and academic activities for a considerable period of time, with Koreans speaking in Korean but writing in Chinese. Chinese characters were referred to as “Jinseo” (“authentic writing”) and considered to be a tool for study and politics, while Hangeul was denigrated as vulgar by the literate elite. Hangeul was largely used by women and commoners as it allowed them to write their speech as it sounded, so it was dismissed as “Eonmun”, or “vernacular script”.

It was only at the end of the 19th century, amid growing Korean nationalism, that Koreans adopted Hangeul in public spheres. In April 1886, a newspaper printed purely in Hangeul was published for the first time. In November 1894, King Gojong (the 26th king of the Joseon Dynasty) issued an imperial order that all laws and orders should be written in Hangeul, with the addition of Chinese characters if need be. However, the imperial order did not cause an immediate change in language use, even though it was noteworthy as the first time that Hangeul had been acknowledged as the official character system of Korea since its creation in the 15th century. The government's Korean character policies sub-

sequently expanded the use of Hangeul, but for an extended period of time, until Korean became the primary language of Korea, Korean was written in a mixed hanja-Hangeul script.

When the government of South Korea was established in 1948, the Act on the Exclusive Usage of Hangeul came into force, its key objective being that “all public documents of the Republic of Korea shall be written in Hangeul. Chinese characters can be used in conjunction with Hangeul as required”. However, the Act failed to penetrate into the everyday lives of Koreans, and public literature, newspapers and even academic publications continued to include Chinese characters. The exclusive usage of Hangeul came about naturally with the emergence of new generations who had been educated solely in Hangeul, and the wide penetration of PCs since the 1980s. At present, Koreans mostly use Hangeul for writing.

Notwithstanding this, however, there are ongoing arguments for strengthening hanja education in schools to perpetuate traditional culture and to continue international exchanges with neighbouring countries such as China and Japan. As such, the use of characters still remains hotly disputed in Korea.

### **3.2 Enforcement and dissemination of language norms**

Korea’s linguistic policies have focused on establishing and promulgating language norms. Korea’s linguistic policies are largely driven by language norms,<sup>1</sup> because Korea’s standard language was formed under exceptional conditions in a very short period of time. In general, most nation states have chosen and disseminated one particular language variant from among many as their standard language. Conventionally, a common language is formed in a certain region among a number of language variants. The language evolves into literary forms over centuries, and earns the title of standard language through public education. However, this was not the case for Korea, where hanja acted as the official written language until modern history began. This meant that the Hangeul-based standard language failed to take shape naturally.

As mentioned earlier, Hangeul was not in common use for a long time following its creation in the 15th century. It was not used in administrative or judicial literature or in literary and creative fields, so standard word forms or written forms could not be developed. As Hangeul was only used for private purposes (i.e. for writing personal letters or journals), the written form of a word varied

---

<sup>1</sup> The language norms of the Korean language have four rules, as follows: 1) Standard Language: select one lexicon among those with an identical meaning and different forms as the standard language. Seoul dialects, generally used by cultured people, constitutes the standard language of Korea; 2) Hangeul Orthography: the rules on spelling and spacing to write the standard language correctly; 3) Notation of Loanword: rules on writing in Korean terms borrowed from a foreign language, or the name of a person or a place in a foreign country; and 4) Romanisation of Korean: standard rules on writing Korean words in Roman characters.

between users (e.g. the word for “daughter-in-law” was written in many variations, such as Myeoneuri, Myeonuri, Myeoneuli or Menuri), and words denoting the same concept had regional variations (e.g. chives were referred to as buchu, jeongguji or sol). This increased the need to formulate standard writing principles and a standard language, and sparked debates on the use of Hangeul at the end of the 19th century, which ground to a halt with the Japanese annexation. The Japanese proclaimed an educational ordinance to instate the Japanese language as the national language of Korea in 1911. In the early period of colonial rule schools continued to teach Korean as an optional subject, but eventually Japan outlawed the use of Korean and forced Koreans to use only Japanese, even in their everyday conversations. As part of a project to restore Korea's ethnic identity, a group of scholars planned to create a Korean language dictionary. In order to publish a dictionary, it was a prerequisite to rationalise Korean spelling and select the standard language. To this end, the Joseon Language Society enacted and announced “The Standardised System for the Korean language” in 1933 and “The Collection of Standard Korean Words” in 1936 – the very first set of language norms for Korea.<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, “Notation of Loanwords” and “Romanisation of Korean” were introduced as part of language norms in the 1940s. However, official distribution of these language norms was impossible due to Japanese rule.

As Korea earned its independence and established its own government, it immediately became necessary to establish standard orthography that could be used in textbooks and other official documents. Naturally, the language norms set by the Joseon Language Society were adopted as the national standard. However, the Korean War, industrialisation and urbanisation brought about a sea change in Korean society. To enable the language norms formulated during colonial rule to be effectively implemented, they were partly modified at the end of the 1980s. The first to be amended was loanword orthography in 1986, followed by Korean orthography and standard language regulations in 1988. The Romanisation of Korean letters was revised in 1984, and again in 2000. Since the establishment of the language norms, the dissemination of standard orthography through formal education and the mass media has been a key task for NIKL.

### **3.3 Linguistic refinement and the improvement of official language**

The idea that Koreans should use and develop their indigenous language has gained ground in Korea. Against this backdrop, replacing loanwords with Korean words

---

<sup>2</sup> At the end of colonial rule in 1942, Japan arrested 33 Korean scholars involved in the making of the dictionary, alleging that the Joseon Language Society were conspirators in an independence movement, which pushed back the creation of the dictionary after liberation. Consisting of six volumes in total, Volume 1 of the dictionary was published in 1947, and Volume 6 in 1957.

has become a key task of language policy makers. This move gained further momentum with the initiative on the exclusive use of Hangeul in writing, as it was necessary to convert Chinese letters and loanwords into simpler Korean in order to write only in Hangeul. Words based on Hanja (Chinese characters), Japanese words introduced during colonial rule, and English loanwords that had found their way into Korean with the arrival of new technologies or products – all these needed to be “refined” into easy Korean words.

Due to Japanese being the official language of Korea during colonial rule, many Japanese words had become integrated into Korean. After liberation, a movement called “Get Back Korean Words” was initiated to replace frequently used Japanese words with their Korean counterparts. For Koreans, gaining independence from Japan meant recovery of their mother tongue, and this movement received a warm welcome from the public. Opposition to the use of Japanese loanwords still remains strong in Korea and a number of Japanese words have disappeared from the everyday life of Koreans.

Since the 1970s, the government has taken the initiative in linguistic refinement. During this period, the object of refinement shifted from Japanese or Chinese to English and other Western loanwords, which were broadly used in terminology and even in casual dialogue. Finding and disseminating appropriate words or phrases to replace loanwords became an important part of linguistic policy. However, while the linguistic refinement movement made dramatic achievements in terms of volume (i.e. refining 20,000 words during the two decades since the foundation of NIKL), the majority of refined words have failed to catch on. Even the proponents of linguistic refinement have been reluctant to use the newly invented Korean words due to them being awkward or unnatural. Thus, NIKL modified its approach in July 2004, and started to engage with the public to create new words. While previously just a few linguistic experts had been involved in inventing new words, now everyone is invited to make suggestions and vote for their preferred choice online to determine the replacement. However, the penetration of newly created words continues to be rather unsatisfactory.

Meanwhile, the purpose of linguistic refinement expanded from simply avoiding the use of difficult Chinese letters or other foreign languages into spreading appropriate and easy words. In other words, the movement moved away from the preservation of the Korean language and towards the facilitation of communication. In particular, state institutions or the media are required to use simple and correct language to ensure that everyone can understand their intended message easily and properly. Thus, NIKL launched its Public Language Division to ensure the use of simple and correct language in the public sector, for example replacing loanwords or over-complicated words, standardising terminologies, proofreading documents issued by state institutions and monitoring the language use of public service providers.

### **3.4 Language aptitude enhancement project**

Language aptitude is fundamental to all social activities. Thus, enhancing aptitude in the native language is also a key objective of linguistic policies. In Korea, the Ministry of Education is responsible for fostering the linguistic ability of students, while the Ministry of Culture and NIKL focus on linguistic education for adults.

The Framework Act on the Korean Language (enacted in 2005) stipulates that a survey of the native language aptitude of the general public shall be conducted on a regular basis. NIKL carried out a basic literacy survey in 2008 to obtain accurate statistics of the illiteracy rate<sup>3</sup> prior to a fully-fledged language aptitude survey, and to identify the basic literacy level of adults in general. In a survey conducted on 12,137 adults aged 19 to 79, the illiteracy rate turned out to be 1.7%. The survey then excluded the illiterate participants and conducted basic literacy tests on the remaining 98.3%. The resulting average literacy score was 63.3, far short of the average score of 77.4 posted by ninth-grade students in middle school. Notably, 5.4% of participants, although able to read and write syllables or words, were unable to properly understand sentences. This was a large-scale public survey, but it was not a comprehensive Korean language aptitude test, as it was designed to assess the minimum reading and writing abilities required for everyday life.

A comprehensive survey on communication ability across all areas of language, including speaking, listening, reading and writing, was conducted in 2013 on 3,000 adults. The result was 579.62 out of 1,000 points. Specialists considered this score to be “on the boundary between average and below average” on a scale of “excellent, average, below average and poor.” Specifically, 11.9% of respondents were rated excellent, 33.4% average, 45.9% below average and 8.8% poor, which meant that only 45.3% had above average linguistic abilities and 54.7% had below average linguistic abilities. By sector, linguistic abilities seemed to diminish in the following order: listening, reading, grammar, speaking and writing. In particular, speaking and writing abilities on average remained at “below average” level, indicating room for improvement in speaking and writing education. One interesting feature of the results was a marked decline in linguistic abilities with age. Respondents in their 20s and 30s scored better than those in their 40s and 50s, and those aged 60 or above had a sizeable proportion of below average scorers, which seems to be attributable to the rapid hike in economic growth and participation in higher education after liberation from Japan and the Korean War. The survey on the linguistic abilities of citizens is conducted every five years, and the next survey (2nd instalment) is scheduled for 2018.

---

<sup>3</sup> The primary objective of the survey was to obtain objective research data on the illiteracy rate, as no official surveys had been conducted since the 1970 census which showed an illiteracy rate of 7.0%.

NIKL provides language education to adults – mostly government employees, teachers, journalists and the armed forces – on language norms, the art of speech and writing, etc. required for their career. Recently, an online curriculum was provided so that anyone can learn the language regardless of time or space. The total number of learners both on- and offline stands at approximately 50,000 people a year.

NIKL also compiles Korean language dictionaries which form the basis of language use. Creating the Korean dictionary was the first project which it embarked on following its establishment to set standards for language use, and the “Standard Korean Dictionary” was published in 1999. The dictionary features 500,000 words, including not only the standard language but also regional dialects, North Korean language and outdated words. In order to produce the dictionary, a corpus consisting of 50 million words was compiled for use in definitions and examples. In 2002, all of the contents of the dictionary were made available online. The dictionary, compiled and published by a state institution, is Korea’s leading standard dictionary: its notations and definitions form the basis of Korean publications and broadcasting language, including textbooks and public documents. NIKL also published “Urimalsaem”, an open online dictionary featuring a million words, to commemorate the Day of Hangeul in October 2016. The dictionary is designed to compensate for the shortcomings of the Standard Korean Dictionary, which, due to its heavy focus on standard Korean, was not able to include new words or terminologies created by social change. In other words, the dictionary features a large collection of words that are frequently used by Koreans although they have not gained standard language status. To overcome the restricted nature of the existing dictionaries, in which only a few specialists participated, the dictionary takes the form of an online wikipedia that is open to all users. To prevent the inclusion of dubious information, the information contributed by general users is screened by professionals before being officially added to the dictionary. Such information is classified as “user suggestions” prior to screening and as “proof-read information” after screening, so that users can take advantage of whichever information they want. Since its launch, 4,340 entries have been put forward, of which 3,969 were officially added and 371 were modified by general users. General users of the dictionary amount to roughly 400 people.

### **3.5 Informatisation of the Korean language**

Since the 1990s, NIKL has been working on the informatisation of the Korean language, i.e. compiling and computerising the outcomes of Korean language research in order to disseminate full and accurate information about the language. The informatisation of the Korean language refers to the processing of Korean materials in a way that is compatible with IT processing. To lay the foundation of computerising the language and its words – including machine translation, voice

recognition and professional search – NIKL developed the 21st Century Sejong Project over a period ten years, starting in 1998. This initiative aims to establish the huge collection of language resources required for the development of language computerisation, and has established and published a corpus of 240 million words picked up from the North Korean language, the Korean spoken by overseas Koreans, from terminologies and from the history of the Korean language. To follow up on this initiative, NIKL constructed a comprehensive management system at national level for effective distribution of the data, which is available on its website.

Area	Details	Achievement
Buildup of basic materials (modern literary Korean)	Construct a raw corpus	133.9 million words
	Construct a morpheme tagged corpus	15.22 million words
	Construct a morph-sense tagged corpus	12.64 million words
	Construct a syntactically annotated corpus	830,000 words
	<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>162.59 million words</b>
Buildup of special materials	Construct an oral transcription corpus (raw & morpheme tagged corpus)	5.2 million words
	Construct a Korean-English parallel corpus (raw & morph-sense tagged corpus)	5.76 million words
	Construct a Korean-Japanese parallel corpus (raw & morph-sense tagged corpus)	1.4 million words
	Construct other parallel corpora (raw corpus)	150,000 words
	Construct North Korean & overseas Korean corpus (raw & morph-sense corpus)	11.12 million words
	Construct a historic corpus	6.53 million words
	<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>30.16 million words</b>
Buildup of terminologies	Construct a raw corpus of terminologies & extract terms	(corpus) 6.5 million words (terms) 1 million entries

Table 2: Overview of the 21st Century Sejong Corpora

Since the 21st Century Sejong Project ended in 2007, no significant Hangeul projects have followed. However, recognising the importance of informatisation for the development of the Korean language, other large-scale language projects will soon follow. The budget for such projects is expected to be made available in

2018 so that the informatisation project, which has been on hold for the last ten years, can be resumed.

### **3.6 Support for education of Korean as a foreign language**

Up until now, Korean has been primarily spoken by residents of North Korea and South Korea, or by Koreans living overseas. Until the 1980s, learning Korean as a foreign language was restricted to diplomats, missionaries and some scholars of Korean studies. However, since the start of the 1990s, the number of foreigners residing in Korea has rapidly increased, including foreign workers and immigrants married to a Korean spouse. Spurred by the growth in international exchange, the number of foreigners willing to learn Korean in their home country has also increased. From the latter half of the 1990s, the teaching of Korean as a foreign language emerged as a key policy directive.

The Framework Act on the Korean Language, enacted in 2005, prescribes that policies shall be formulated to assist foreigners in learning Korean. In the light of this, the Ministry of Culture and NIKL have operated a Korean Language Teacher Qualification System, provided standard Korean Language courses for foreigners, and published a variety of educational resources. In 2007 NIKL established the international Sejong Korean Language School to provide official teaching of Korean as a foreign language. The school has grown steadily to 174 branches in 58 countries around the world. Meanwhile, NIKL has continued to promote teacher training, while also developing and distributing textbooks specifically aimed at improving the Korean language proficiency of the increasing number of multi-cultural families in Korea.

## **4. Tasks**

### **4.1 Materialisation of language norms to facilitate communication**

The Korean language does not have much regional or social variation, although due to the short period during which Hangeul has been in use and the history of Japanese colonial rule, the propagation of the standard language has remained a major policy objective in order to facilitate communication. Lately, however, the situation appears to be changing somewhat.

In 2006, members of civil organisations advocating the right to use regional dialects as their standard language filed a constitutional appeal against the standard language regulations. They asserted that the regulations (which identify a “standard language” mostly based on Seoul dialects) and the Framework Act on the Korean Language (which prescribes the exclusive use of the standard language in all official, public literature and textbooks) infringe the right to use regional

dialects. In May 2009 the Constitutional Court ruled that the standard language regulations and the Framework Act on Korean Language did not constitute a breach of the Constitution. However, although the exclusive use of the standard language was not judged unconstitutional, this case prompted many people to review Korean language policies, which had long focused on the standard language. In the past it was important to spread the standard language, but now, due to higher education levels and the advancement of transportation and telecommunication technologies, there are hardly any communication difficulties between different regions. In fact, the native language culture of local areas has started to disappear – something which needs to be addressed. To tackle this, Korean linguistic policies have recently started to depart from the one-size-fits-all approach, and to seek to reflect the realities of language use, recognising the most frequent usage as the standard one, unless this causes communication hindrances.

“Jjajangmyeon” is one of Korea’s favourite noodle dishes, a Chinese noodle dish which is especially popular among children. The standard orthography, which follows the principle of transliterating Chinese into Korean, was “Jajangmyeon”, but in real life “Jjajangmyeon” was the more generally accepted term. Thus, orthographic inconsistencies had existed for decades, with “Jjajangmyeon” used informally (e.g. on signboards or menus) and “Jajangmyeon” in more formal settings such as media, textbooks or dictionaries. From 2000 there were increasing calls to mitigate such inconsistencies, stirring a heated debate over whether to follow the pre-defined norms or to adopt the most commonly used form. After a long drawn-out debate, Jjajangmyeon was recognized as a standard orthography along with Jajangmyeon in August 2011. Korea has continued to unearth the words and phrases most often used in daily conversations and has accorded them standard language status. While Korea had previously distinguished the Seoul dialect form as the standard language in cases where there were a number of words with identical meanings but different forms, it now adds regional or social dialects to the standard language as long as this does not obstruct communication. In other words, it seeks to reflect the realities of language use while minimising confusion between language users. NIKL plans to continue revisiting Korean language standards to incorporate the realities of language use through ongoing basic research, including surveys on language use and the accumulation of corpora.

## **4.2 Linguistic policies for the marginalised**

As Korean society becomes more diverse, there is a growing number of underprivileged people with language difficulties. To ensure their social inclusion, appropriate linguistic policies need to be designed. NIKL considers members of multi-cultural families, North Korean defectors, those with linguistic disabilities such as the hearing-impaired and children of low-income families as the targets of its socially inclusive linguistic policies.

Members of multi-cultural families cite communication as the biggest stumbling block in their life in Korea. Since 2007 NIKL has published a wide range of educational resources, including standard textbooks for immigrant women. NIKL has also developed educational resources for couples in Vietnamese and Chinese so that married couples can learn the Korean language and culture together, as well as picture books and children's songs for infants from multi-cultural families. Recently, NIKL has developed textbooks for students, guidebooks for teachers and exercise books for immigrant children born and raised in a foreign country who come to Korea when their parent marries a Korean.

North Korean defectors who settle in South Korea face linguistic difficulties due to disparities in pronunciation, vocabulary and language culture, even though they are native Korean speakers. NIKL has developed and deployed a language training programme linked to their social adjustment programmes, so that they can learn Korean more effectively and establish themselves in Korean society.

Meanwhile, the hearing impaired refers to those using sign language as their native language (which has a different grammar from Korean), even though they are native Koreans. There had not been any systematic research or support for the hearing impaired due to a lack of understanding of sign language and the difficulties that the hearing impaired face. Recently, awareness has improved thanks to the efforts of NIKL, the Korea Association of the Deaf and other organisations. NIKL, as an institution responsible for linguistic policies, has provided a variety of support in the form of policies to recognise Korean sign language as a full-fledged language and to enhance the communication abilities of the hearing impaired: for instance, it is currently working on the standardisation of sign language, the development of a video dictionary of sign language and the assembly of a Korean sign language corpus. Notably, the Korean Sign Language Act was passed by Parliament in 2016, resulting in the launch of a department within NIKL dedicated to sign language and braille. Going forward, research and projects to support and enhance the communication abilities of the hearing impaired and the visually impaired are expected to increase.

NIKL also provides Korean learning programmes to children of low-income families to improve their basic proficiency in Korean, which is fundamental to all spheres of learning. Basic Korean proficiency (i.e. reading and writing) is essential to the learning of all disciplines, and children who fail to develop basic proficiency in Korean may become under-achievers or have difficulties planning for the future. Accordingly, NIKL has developed educational resources to improve the reading and grammar skills of primary school children, and sent Korean language teachers to regional children's centres across the country.<sup>4</sup> This project aims to improve the Korean language proficiency of society as a whole and strengthen national competitiveness in the long term.

---

<sup>4</sup> Welfare facilities providing after-school care programmes to low-income children and young people.

### **4.3 Preparation for the reunification of Korea**

South Korea and North Korea have undergone different linguistic developments, resulting in some stark linguistic differences. Some researchers believe that since no fundamental linguistic changes have been made (e.g. to grammar), inter-Korean communication would not present difficulties and the degree of heterogeneity should not be severe. However, the two Koreas have set different standard languages, based on the Seoul and Pyeongyang dialects respectively, not to mention differences in orthography, the language refinement movement that has taken place in North Korea, and the influence of loanwords on the language in South Korea. Thus, efforts have been made to achieve a smooth integration of the language spoken in South and North Korea in preparation for the possible reunification of Korea.

Since its foundation, NIKL has conducted ongoing research on linguistic inconsistencies between the two Koreas, although this has not yet yielded significant outcomes due to limitations in reference materials and budgetary constraints. NIKL started by studying the Joseonmaldaesajeon (the Great Dictionary of Korean) compiled by North Korea's Social Science Institute in 1992 in order to identify disparities and commonalities in the languages. The outcome of this research was included in the North Korean headwords and definitions in the Pyojungugeodaesajeon (Standard Korean Language Dictionary) published in 1999. Since then, there has been sporadic research on language norms (e.g. Hangeul orthography), and comparisons of textbook words and literary works.

Members of NIKL met the members of the Linguistic Centre of the Social Science Institute of North Korea for the first time in 1996 at an international conference held in Changchun, China, and corresponded with North Korean scholars on seven occasions up until 2007, with the aim of enhancing our mutual understanding of language and seeking opportunities for joint research on prospective language integration. However, such interactions have come to a halt as South-North relations have become strained. Meanwhile, NIKL runs projects to support North Korean defectors to settle in South Korea. At present, it is conducting a broad array of basic research to establish the North Korean corpus and to achieve integration of the language, which will be further expanded in the future.

A more notable achievement is the compilation of the Gyeoremalkeunsajeon (Dictionary of a People's Language), the first Korean language dictionary jointly compiled by North Korean and South Korean scholars to address linguistic differences. The dictionary will feature approximately 300,000 entries, including words and phrases which have been used in different forms or with varied definitions following the separation of Korea, and new words that were not included in existing dictionaries. The project came about through the late pastor Mun Ik-hwan, a South Korean reunification activist born in North Korea, who visited North Korea in 1989 and suggested the creation of a "Korean Language Dictionary for Reunification"

to the then leader of North Korea, Kim Il-sung. The compilation process began with the setting up of a Committee for the Joint Compilation of Gyeoremalkeunsajeon at Mount Geumgangsán in February 2005. Following this, joint compilation meetings were held four times a year until 2009 to discuss issues that arose in the process of compilation. By 2009, scholars had completed the selection of entries and started to research them, but joint meetings ceased until June 2014 following the severance of North-South exchange in 2010. The meetings resumed in July 2014 and were subsequently held 24 times until December 2015. During this period, the scholars agreed on the principles of compilation, selected approximately 300,000 entries and completed their description of the entries, in the course of which they also agreed on the name and order of syllabics that differed in the two Koreas. They are currently discussing the unification of some norms such as initial law and sai-siot (insertion of /s/) rules. They have now cross-checked the manuscripts and are preparing the first draft; this will then be corrected and proofread, and hopefully published in 2019.

NIKL formulated a mid- to long-term plan to establish linguistic policies for a reunified Korea in 2014, and has since engaged in basic research for building the North Korean corpus and for integrating terminologies. The corpus, based on a large collection of language data in North Korea, is designed to lay the foundation for more formal research, while the studies on the integration of terminologies aim to prepare for the standardisation of words in North and South Korea by comparing and analysing the words of the two countries in the sphere of basic science, maths and linguistic studies. The scope of research is expected to increase in the future.

#### **4.4 Quality enhancement of Korean language education**

The government has supported Korean language education through a number of ministries, including the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Gender Equality, to cope with the soaring demand for Korean language education. However, Korean language education policies have been tilted towards quantitative growth rather than the development of quality content. This was somewhat inevitable due to the radical increase in demand, but now the consensus is that the quality of Korean language education should be further enhanced.

In the light of this, NIKL plans to strengthen basic research to ensure better content in Korean language education. NIKL had previously focused on creating Korean learning resources for students of the Sejong Korean Language School located abroad, and for immigrant women and children from multi-cultural families, which was essential to fulfil an urgent need for the supply of educational resources. However, demand for various levels of textbooks to cater for the different needs of learners will continue to increase, and it is unrealistic for the state

to satisfy all the individual needs of language learners. When the first batch of standard textbooks has been completed, NIKL will focus more on enhancing the quality of Korean language education through basic research. By using the results of this basic research, schools and educational facilities will be able to develop and use their own materials.

NIKL produced a standard curriculum for Korean language education in 2011 and 2012. In addition, since 2012 it has been assessing and selecting a list of words and phrases by proficiency level, from beginner through to intermediate and advanced, and since 2015 it has been amassing a computerised corpus based on a large collection of language data from Korean learners. Once all the results are pulled together and classified, the list of words, phrases and grammar items that need to be learnt in each step will be formulated in order, and empirical data on the learning of Korean by those with different levels of proficiency will be built up. It is hoped that this will make the learning of Korean much more methodical and structured.

**Bibliographical information**

This text was first published in the book:

Gerhard Stickel (ed.) (2018): National language institutions and national languages. Contributions to the EFNIL Conference 2017 in Mannheim. Budapest: Research Institute for Linguistics, Hungarian Academy of Sciences. [299 pages.]

The electronic PDF version of the text is accessible through the EFNIL website at:

<http://www.efnil.org>