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## LANGUAGE POLICY AND REGIONAL VARIETIES OF THE KOREAN LANGUAGE

### ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to provide information on the language policy, planning, and management in the Republic of Korea. The research is focused on Standard Korean and the current state of Korean regional dialects. Language policy and its effect on regional varieties of Korean language are discussed. Particularly, problems of maintenance and revitalization of regional dialects are described. Included are the efforts towards a language reunion with North Korea and the impact of new technologies.

**Keywords:** Korean language, language policy, language planning, regional dialects, Standard Korean, public language, plain Korean, Jeju dialect

## INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

In South Korea<sup>2</sup>, Standard Korean, primarily derived from the Seoul dialect, functions as the *de facto* norm across formal domains such as education, administration, and media. This standardization, deeply embedded in educational and governmental frameworks, epitomizes the linguistic landscape of the nation. However, this national linguistic uniformity also casts regional dialects in a contrasting light, often stereotyped as rustic and unsophisticated compared to the perceived elegance of Standard Korean.

This paper explores the intricate dynamics of language policy, planning, and management within the Republic of Korea, focusing on how these elements shape both Standard Korean and its regional varieties. Central to the discussion are the issues of maintenance and revitalization of these dialects, especially in light of modern challenges such as globalization and technological advancement. Additionally, the paper delves into the historical context that has influenced contemporary language policies, tracing the evolution of linguistic strategies from the late 19th century to today. The broader implications of language policies that affect dialectal diversity are also examined, including efforts to bridge linguistic divides between North and South Korea and the role of new technologies in preserving linguistic diversity. The impact of these policies on societal cohesion and the identity of individual communities is scrutinized, particularly through the lens of the endangered Jeju dialect. The Jeju dialect, although currently classified as critically endangered, is the subject of robust preservation efforts, with local authorities regularly devising comprehensive plans aimed at its protection and revitalization.

Furthermore, the role of language in fostering national unity and the tension between cultural preservation and linguistic modernization are examined. Through this exploration, the paper aims to contribute to the understanding of language as both a marker of identity and a tool of cultural expression, all while navigating the complexities of societal change and technological integration. This comprehensive approach provides a holistic view of the multifaceted nature of language policy in South Korea, highlighting its implications for cultural continuity and social integration.

## A BRIEF HISTORICAL OUTLOOK ON LANGUAGE POLICY IN KOREA

In many countries around the world today, regional varieties of language are in decline, due to the enforcement and preference for the use of standard language varieties. This phenomenon is often a component of language policy and planning, involving

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<sup>1</sup> The transliteration used here follows the Revised Romanization of Korean system (2000), officially introduced by the National Academy of the Korean Language (NAKL) and the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. Korean names are presented following traditional convention, with the family name preceding the given name.

<sup>2</sup> In this context, “South Korea” is used synonymously with the “Republic of Korea,” while “Korea” refers to the geographical designation of the Korean Peninsula.

government promotion of a standardized variety, which is attributed with higher social prestige. This has a certain impact on the regional varieties of the language, or the minority languages of a given country. The role of the national/state language as a unifying medium of communication for the entire population of the state is understandably desirable for numerous reasons. However, the role of the standard language often carries with it social prestige, which can, to some extent, disadvantage speakers of dialects. Although from a linguistic perspective, no variety of language is considered superior, social discrimination can occur in this context.

From ancient times to the present, there have been so-called language purists who strive for the correctness and purity of language. In cases of language purism, correctness is judged based on adherence to prescriptive grammars. The Republic of Korea clearly stands among the countries that have succeeded in achieving a high level of language standardization and codification of spelling, pronunciation, and unification of the literary layer of vocabulary, as evidenced by the compilation and publishing of extensive dictionaries and corpora of the Korean language, as well as ongoing efforts for language purification. The current rules of Korean spelling are quite rigid in nature, and government authorities show little willingness to adjust these rules. Consequently, today's spoken Korean language differs significantly from the prescriptive rules of Korean spelling.<sup>3</sup>

The turn of the 19th and 20th centuries represents a crucial epoch in the evolution of modern Korean linguistics and its related language policy, a time when the Korean language and its script were solidified as core symbols of Korean national identity. This pivotal development unfolded against the backdrop of the nation's progressive modernization, challenges to its sovereignty, and a burgeoning sense of Korean nationalism. To fully appreciate the profound significance of the Korean language and script during this era, it is imperative to contextualize this tumultuous period within the wider framework of the Enlightenment movement, alongside diverse social, political, and scientific trends. Nonetheless, the purpose of this concise historical overview is to furnish the indispensable context needed to comprehend the contemporary landscape of Korean language policy effectively.<sup>4</sup>

The aforementioned era, specifically the closing decades of the 19th century and the dawn of the 20th century, was distinguished by escalated pressures from global powers aimed at dismantling Korea's longstanding isolation and progressively asserting dominance. This epoch witnessed the inception of the first international treaties, which, despite their somewhat imbalanced nature, were foundational in integrating Korea into the global arena and heralding an era of unprecedented information exchange. For the Korean polity, this translated into heightened external pressures, notably from Japan, the United States, and European nations, urging transformative shifts within the socio-economic landscape, while simultaneously fostering the growth and mobilization

<sup>3</sup> V. Mazana, *Morfologická charakteristika korejského dialektu ostrova Čedžu, porovnání se standardní variantou a analýza zachovalých prvků středověké korejštiny*, Diploma paper, Univerzita Karlova (CUNI), 2022.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

of Korea's internal resources, and bolstering national consciousness and pride. It was a seminal period marked by the crystallization of a modern Korean national identity and the emergence of a bourgeois nationalism ideology, propelled by aspirations to establish a sovereign, contemporary nation-state.<sup>5</sup>

Concomitantly, this phase signified a pivotal moment for Korea and its linguistic studies as it engaged more deeply with global advancements, catalyzing the initial endeavors towards a deliberate, modern approach to language policy. These initiatives gained further momentum during the Japanese occupation from 1910 to 1945. Despite the severe repressions and limitations imposed by the occupying forces on the usage of the Korean language, it was also a time characterized by a surge in linguistic nationalism. This period saw the Korean Linguistic Society lay down the groundwork for a unified Korean orthography in 1933, a foundational effort that has underpinned all subsequent modifications, up to and including the contemporary rules.<sup>6</sup>

Since the establishment of the government of the Republic of Korea in 1948, government-led policies have shaped various aspects of Korean society, including language policy. The period following the Korean War (1950-1953), which concluded with an uncertain armistice and the subsequent mutual isolation of the northern and southern parts of the Korean peninsula, can be characterized in terms of language policy as being state-directed, albeit without mutual coordination. Given the divergent political, economic, and cultural developments of the two Koreas, there has been a significant divergence in the area of language. This divergence is most starkly manifested in the realm of vocabulary today; however, differences can also be found in other areas, including pronunciation, spelling rules, regulations for transcribing foreign words, and even the order of letters in the Korean alphabet.<sup>7</sup>

Since the 1960s, dialects have been increasingly marginalized from public life, particularly evident in the case of Jeju Island, where the beginning of a significant decline in the Jeju dialect can be observed. Communication domains have remained largely confined to the private sphere, and in the context of urbanization since the 1960s, there has been a substantial outflow of working-age individuals to cities, which has had a detrimental impact on the state of the dialect. The rapid industrialization from the 1970s onwards further solidified the government's role as the primary driver of national policies. Post-Korean War social movements like the Saemaul Undong aimed at societal and economic reconstruction, highlighting the need to address barriers to development, including language policies that marginalized dialects. Despite dialects being viewed as less prestigious compared to standard language, they are vital for daily communication. With societal diversification, there's a noticeable shift in public attitudes towards dialects, supported by initiatives like local autonomy systems and decentralization policies.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> V. Pucek, M. Buskova, *Jazyková politika v Koreji*, Praha 2000.

<sup>8</sup> Jo Jaehyeong, Baek Seunghyeon, "Bangeone daehan eonjungui eoneo taedo gochal" (An Exploratory Study on the Change of the Linguistic Attitudes toward Dialects), *Eomunnonchong*, vol. 40 (2022), p. 139.

The protection of regional dialects, which are minority languages in Korean society, seems to have entered a proper trajectory in the 1990s, and its starting point can be seen in the local autonomy system. The advent of comprehensive local governance expanded local authorities' roles, leading them to leverage dialects in their strategies to enhance regional identity and stimulate local economies.<sup>9</sup>

Instituted in 2005, the *National Language Basic Act* became a catalyst for both national and local authorities to formally engage in the promotion and development of the Korean language and its dialects. This legislative move allowed dialects, previously marginalized, to gain official recognition and support, leading to the implementation of varied policies by the National Institute of Korean Language. Furthermore, the repositioning of public agencies to non-capital areas has played a critical role in reshaping national perceptions, encouraging a more positive view towards dialects amidst a global appreciation for linguistic diversity.<sup>10</sup>

The designation of the Standard Korean Dictionary as normative primarily stems from its comprehensive incorporation of linguistic norms. These norms span from *Korean orthography and spelling rules*<sup>11</sup> and *Standards language regulations*<sup>12</sup> to *Foreign words transcription rules*<sup>13</sup> and *Romanization system for Korean*,<sup>14</sup> extending to include the *Standard Language Collection* (1990)<sup>15</sup> interpretative materials from the National Institute of Korean Language (2018)<sup>16</sup>. The manifestation of normativity within the dictionary and linguistic rules diverges due to their differing formats. Linguistic rules succinctly dictate norms through specific clauses and examples in a unified text format. In contrast, the dictionary, with its structured entries, definitions, and examples, offers a detailed and multifaceted textual exploration of words' meanings and applications. Reflecting linguistic norms at the lexical level in a dictionary might seem straightforward. However, challenges emerge when conveying complex nuances that surpass mere word definitions, demonstrating the intricate relationship between dictionary entries and overarching linguistic standards.

The National Institute of Korean Language manages two main dictionaries: the Standard Korean Dictionary and the Uri Mal Same which is an open dictionary. While the former establishes norms, the latter provides a wide range of language data for communication without strict norms. However, both dictionaries, despite their differences, face challenges in defining their roles within the language community.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 145.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 148.

<sup>11</sup> '한글맞춤법'.

<sup>12</sup> '표준어규정'.

<sup>13</sup> '외래어표기법'.

<sup>14</sup> '국어의 로마자표기법'.

<sup>15</sup> 표준어모음 (1990).

<sup>16</sup> 국립국어원(2018), 한글맞춤법·표준어규정해설.

<sup>17</sup> Jeong Huichang, "Pyeojungueo daesajeonui gyubeomseonggwa haeseok" (Norms and Interpretations of Pyojun Korean Dictionary), *Hanguk sajeonhak*, vol. 41 (2022), p. 84.

The relationship between the Standard Korean Dictionary and Uri Mal Saem is notable for including aspects like ‘old words,’ ‘North Korean language,’ ‘dialects,’ and ‘specialized vocabulary’ in Uri Mal Saem. While this inclusion may signal a shift towards less normative topics, it also implies the necessity for a different approach. Transitioning the inclusion of specialized vocabulary in national dictionaries to focus solely on essential terms for language use is crucial. This transition demands Uri Mal Saem to have expertise comparable to specialized dictionaries. Both dictionaries complement each other; for instance, if you search for a word from a dialect in the Standard Korean Dictionary, it suggests referring to Uri Mal Saem for more comprehensive information, such as meanings and usage, and actively participates in the editing process.

## STANDARD KOREAN AND ITS ROLE IN LANGUAGE POLICY

This part explores the importance of Standard Korean<sup>18</sup> and its implications within the broader context of language policy in South Korea. Within the framework of contemporary Korean language policy and planning, the authoritative body is the National Institute of the Korean Language, which operates under the aegis of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism. Official positions regarding the Korean language are articulated in the Basic Law on the Korean Language, with the norms of the Korean language further delineated by four additional laws. These include the Rules of Korean Orthography, the Standard Language Act, the Rules for Transcription of Foreign Words, and the Romanization of Korean Rules. The contemporary Seoul language of the educated populace is defined as the standard Korean language by the Standard Language Act, serving as the official language of the Republic of Korea. The only other language recognized as official language of the Republic of Korea is Korean Sign Language.<sup>19</sup>

Variants of the Korean language specific to different regions are classified as regional dialects. Despite the lack of mutual intelligibility, the Jeju dialect is accorded the status of a regional variant of the standard Korean language. Nonetheless, this categorization has been critiqued by scholars as being inadequate, particularly because it pertains to the native language of Jeju Province, which has been granted the legal status of a special autonomous province. This critique opens up a substantive dialogue regarding the potential recognition of the Jeju language as one of the official languages of the Republic

<sup>18</sup> The standard form of Korean is denoted as “pyojun-eo” in Korean. When Koreans refer to their language, that is, the Korean language, they commonly use the term “kugo” (국어; 國語), which literally translates to “national language” (“kuk” 國 meaning nation, and “eo” 어 語 meaning language). This widely used term, however, can be considered somewhat vague and limiting, as it could ostensibly refer to the language of any nation. Consequently, some Korean authors advocate for the use of a more precise term, “hangugeo” (한국어; 韓國語), which incorporates the morpheme “han” (韓), denoting Korean, thus conveying the unambiguous meaning of “Korean language.” Additionally, the term “hangugeo” is often employed when referring to Korean as a foreign language, further delineating its use in contexts emphasizing linguistic study or acquisition outside the native Korean-speaking community.

<sup>19</sup> V. Mazana, *Morfologická charakteristika...*

of Korea. Although it is neither an official nor an administrative language, the Jeju language is often specifically mentioned in studies concerning endangered languages.

The language policy of Standard Korean is notably stringent, with the existence of the Standard Korean Dictionary exemplifying this rigor. Being state-led, Standard Korean Dictionary distinguishes itself by carrying a meaning and attitude that sets it apart from other dictionaries. Its unparalleled authority and trust within society stem from being compiled and continuously managed by the nation's normative authority. This strict adherence to a consistent interpretation of linguistic norms from its inception highlights the rigidity of Korean language policy, as it not only reflects but also shapes the linguistic standards across the country.

The Standard Korean Dictionary is currently utilized as a principal reference in the Korean language sphere. Originally, its normative guidelines were mostly limited to aspects like spelling according to the Korean orthographic principles and the choice of standard lexical items. Yet, the extent of these guidelines has broadened to include the meanings, applications, grammatical aspects, and pragmatic uses of words. The range of interpretations of these norms has also grown, extending their influence on everyday language use. To claim that the entirety of the Standard Korean Dictionary is regarded as setting norms would not be exaggerating. Nevertheless, it is obvious that not every part of the dictionary can be considered normative. This is because certain sections either lie outside the purview of normative considerations or do not necessitate such evaluations.<sup>20</sup>

The identity of the Standard Korean Dictionary as a normative dictionary is significantly tied to its formation by the state. Labeling the Standard Korean Dictionary a normative dictionary signifies its role in embodying linguistic norms within its format, showcasing benchmarks of linguistic practices. This normativity includes details like spelling, pronunciation, grammatical rules, and usage, collectively forming a normative system.<sup>21</sup> This system reflects adherence to established linguistic norms, including orthographic rules and standard language choices, to discern language suited for formal contexts. Thus, normativity serves as a guideline for differentiating formal from personal language use, emphasizing the dictionary's function in setting linguistic standards.<sup>22</sup>

The Standard Korean Dictionary has evolved to serve as a key platform for illustrating shifts in linguistic norms and features a distinct list of multiple standard terms. This strategy, formalized to regularly enhance dictionary entries on a quarterly basis, mirrors the success of the National Institute of Korean Language's multiple standard language initiative started in 2011.<sup>23</sup> Uniformity in the presentation of norms within the dictionary is crucial for clear communication, especially due to the intricate nature

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<sup>20</sup> Jeong Huichang, "Pyeojungugeo daesajeonui...", p. 67.

<sup>21</sup> Normativity should be confined to aspects related to Korean orthography, standard language regulations, foreign/romanization spelling methods, and standard pronunciation laws.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 69.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 70.

of dictionary content. Variability in how norms are presented could undermine the clarity and efficacy of norm dissemination. Moreover, due to the inherent characteristics of a Korean dictionary, it is not possible to present the entirety of linguistic norms within the dictionary itself.

## KOREAN PUBLIC LANGUAGE

The process of standardization in recent decades has culminated in a push for promoting public language in Korea under the motto ‘Let’s use easy Korean language’ in recent years. In this endeavor, Korea has been primarily inspired by the practices in the USA, England, Sweden, and France, adopting a global perspective on linguistic accessibility and inclusiveness. The Plain Korean website serves as a resource, offering the general public information about the concept of public language. Summarizing the main objectives, they are as follows. Public language is used in government and social welfare activities, meant for widespread dissemination and understanding among the populace. It is predominantly utilized by government agencies, educational institutions, and public enterprises, forming the core of communication in public administration and services. Public language should be in Korean<sup>24</sup>, avoiding foreign translations and styles to ensure it aligns with Korean cultural and linguistic norms. It must uphold equality and non-discrimination, reflecting the rights and dignity of all citizens. For effective communication and public service, it should be easily understandable, adhering to principles of clarity and accessibility, following global trends towards simplification in legal and public documents.<sup>25</sup>

Since 2006, the concept of ‘public language’ has been recognized in Korea, with significant advancement following the establishment of the ‘public language promotion department’ at the National Institute of the Korean Language (NIKL) in May 2009. The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism (MCST) and NIKL have spearheaded efforts to enhance the clarity of language used by public entities and the media, focusing on both indirect measures like publishing guidelines and educational programs, and direct interventions such as support services for language queries and the assessment of public language use within various institutions. These initiatives aim to standardize and improve the accessibility of language across public platforms, ensuring effective communication with the citizenry.<sup>26</sup>

Koreans can generally infer the meanings of their language, even from imperfect sentences, but the complexity of the words used can significantly hinder comprehension. The essence of a sentence’s difficulty often hinges on the specific terminology

<sup>24</sup> This refers to native Korean words, meaning not Sino-Korean or foreign terms, ideally excluding even hybrid expressions.

<sup>25</sup> “Swiun urimareul sseuja” (Let’s Use Easy Korean language), *Plain Korean*, 2021, at <https://www.plainkorean.kr/ko/public/what.do>, 5 XII 2024.

<sup>26</sup> Cho Tae-rin, “On the Direction of Public Language Policy in Korea – Focused on Requirements and Guidelines of Public Language,” *Eoneobak*, vol. 40, no. 2 (2015), p. 272.



employed, indicating that the choice of language in public discourse is crucial. A wide array of professionals, including public officials, scholars, and journalists, contribute to crafting the public language, with public officials notably playing a key role in formalizing terminology within government policies. This collective responsibility underlines the importance of carefully selecting terms to enhance public understanding and accessibility, as these choices directly influence the public's grasp of government policies and societal issues.

The Plain Korean website also elucidates the reasons why public language is necessary. Public language, pivotal in affecting citizens' health, safety, and rights, should be easily understandable to ensure the effectiveness of policy implementation. The complexity and misuse of foreign terms in public language can create barriers for those with limited foreign language proficiency, potentially deterring participation in public discourse and weakening democracy. The responsibility for the choice and dissemination of terms falls on public officials and journalists, highlighting the need for careful selection and usage. To maintain the accessibility of public language, difficult terms, neologisms, and jargon should be promptly translated into simple Korean, with the government and institutions like the National Institute of Korean Language taking active roles in standardizing and simplifying language for the public's comprehension.<sup>27</sup>

Public officials are required by Article 14 of the Basic Korean Language Act to write official documents in simple Korean that the general public can easily understand, adhering to specific writing principles and using Hangul, with certain exceptions for Hanja or foreign characters. The amendment to the Act mandates the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism to annually evaluate and publicly disclose the comprehensibility of these documents starting from 2022.<sup>28</sup> The evaluation focuses on the use of understandable terms, simple sentences, adherence to linguistic norms, and the use of Hangul, with the goal of making information accessible to all citizens.<sup>29</sup>

On the Plain Korean website, guidelines for the Korean public language are available, including the Easy Korean Dictionary<sup>30</sup>, which provides simple Korean equivalents, usage examples, and additional word information for replacing foreign terms with Korean ones. The site encourages the use of simple Korean over difficult foreign language expressions in public language utilized by government bodies, public institutions, and media outlets. Regular updates of new words and suggestions for their use in Korean, along with guidance on abbreviations and acronyms for international terms, are also featured. Additionally, the website offers a tool that checks texts for foreign words, which can then be substituted with pure Korean terms.

<sup>27</sup> “Swiun urimareul sseuja...”

<sup>28</sup> Amendment of the Basic Korean Language Act from 15 VI 2021.

<sup>29</sup> Challenges arise in setting objective criteria for what constitutes “easy-to-understand” language, underscoring the importance of guidance and support from linguistic institutions in maintaining clear public communication.

<sup>30</sup> “Swiun urimareul sajeon,” *Plain Korean Dictionary*, 2021, at [https://www.plainkorean.kr/ko/dictionary/dic\\_new.do](https://www.plainkorean.kr/ko/dictionary/dic_new.do), 5 XII 2024.

## REGIONAL DIALECTS IN KOREA

The exploration of regional dialects in Korea unveils a complex linguistic tapestry, where societal biases, historical influences, and the interplay between Sino-Korean and native Korean vocabulary shape the perception and valorization of language across the peninsula. Although dialects are on the decline, they embody crucial cultural testimonies, holding intrinsic value that bears witness to the identity of their speakers, thus underscoring their significance in the broader cultural and linguistic heritage of the Korean peninsula.

First, we will take a closer look at the definition of the term *bangeon*, which in Standard Korean means dialect. In general, a dialect can be defined as a specific system of phonetics, phonology, grammar, and vocabulary that is used only in a particular region or social class due to the geographic and social differentiation of a homogeneous language. According to the Standard Korean dictionary, *bangeon* is defined as *a system of speech that is differentiated by the region of use or social class within a language*.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, it is also noted that it refers to *speech used only in a specific region, not standard language*<sup>32</sup> and that it equals the term *saturi*, another word used to denote dialect, however, it might be perceived as a term having a less respectful connotation<sup>33</sup>. There are also terms for regional dialect, some of these, like *sigolmal* (countryside speech) are perceived somewhat pejoratively.<sup>34</sup>

In South Korea, dialects are primarily classified by major regional divisions, which include the Seoul and Gyeonggi (standard Korean), Gangwon, Chungcheong, Jeolla, Gyeongsang and Jeju dialects, each reflecting unique phonetic, lexical, and grammatical traits. These regional dialects not only differ in pronunciation and vocabulary but also embody cultural distinctions and local identities that are deeply rooted in each area's historical and social background. The classification of these dialects provides valuable insights into the linguistic diversity within Korea, highlighting how geographical and social factors have influenced language evolution across the peninsula.

## LANGUAGE POLICY AND REGIONAL DIALECTS

Examining the nuanced relationship between language policies and regional dialects, this section explores how linguistic governance influences the status, usage, and interaction

<sup>31</sup> "Bangeon," *Standard Korean Dictionary*, at <https://stdict.korean.go.kr/search/searchView.do>, 3 III 2024.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> The perception of dialects as inferior to the standard language, often stemming from the public's historical view of Sino-Korean words as more sophisticated than native Korean words, may also contribute to why another term (e.g. *saturi*) used to denote dialect might be viewed with a lesser degree of respect.

<sup>34</sup> Among other frequently used terms is "jijeogeo" (regional language), and one can also encounter terms like "waeo," "waeon," "toeo," "toeum," and "tohwa," which the Standard Korean Dictionary also lists as synonymous expressions.

between Standard Korean and the diverse regional variations of the Korean language. It aims to elucidate the interplay between standardization efforts and the intricate linguistic practices prevalent in Korean society.

## THE CASE OF JEJU: STANDARD KOREAN, JEJU DIALECT, STANDARDIZATION, AND EFFORTS FOR PRESERVATION AND REVITALIZATION OF THE JEJU LANGUAGE

In this section, we delve into the unique linguistic landscape of Jeju, where the interplay between Standard Korean and the Jeju dialect poses distinctive challenges. Situated in a region characterized by a prevalence of Standard Korean speakers, the Jeju dialect faces pressures of standardization. Despite this, efforts to preserve and revitalize the Jeju language persist, spearheaded by governmental, local authority, and autonomous initiatives. These endeavors offer a concrete example of how approaches to dialects are shaped within the broader context of language policy and cultural preservation in South Korea.

The interest in the Jeju language significantly increased after December 2010 when UNESCO classified it as a critically endangered language, highlighting the urgency of its preservation. The national discourse around making English an official language in Jeju Province paradoxically spurred efforts to protect and revitalize the Jeju language, linking “regional language” with regional cultural value. Local authorities and the National Institute of the Korean Language have been actively supporting projects to preserve Korean regional dialects, including Jeju language, through various surveys and cultural investigations. These initiatives aim not only to reconnect the local population with their heritage but also to utilize the Jeju dialect’s potential for attracting tourists and as a distinctive exportable cultural product.<sup>35</sup>

In 2007, the Jeju Provincial Council established the *Regulation on the Protection and Promotion of the Jeju Language*,<sup>36</sup> aimed at preserving and enhancing Jeju’s regional culture through language support, as outlined in Article 4 of the Basic Law on the Korean Language.<sup>37</sup> The regulation mandates the creation of an environment conducive to the use and development of the Jeju language, with strategic initiatives including the digitization of the language, enhanced educational efforts, and a comprehensive biennial report by the governor on the policy’s progress.

As of a 2011 amendment, the formulation of the Basic Plan for the Development of the Jeju Language must consider and discuss eight key issues, including the direction of Jeju language policy, enhancing residents’ proficiency, promoting the language

<sup>35</sup> V. Mazana, *Morfologická charakteristika*, p. 40.

<sup>36</sup> “Jejueo bojeon mit yukseong jorye” (Jejueo Preservation and Promotion Ordinance), *Center for Jeju Studies*, 2024, at [http://www.jst.re.kr/upload/board/pdf/122\\_1547433117269.pdf](http://www.jst.re.kr/upload/board/pdf/122_1547433117269.pdf), 5 XII 2024.

<sup>37</sup> “Gugeogibonbeop” (Basic Law on the Korean Language), *National Law Information Center*, 2019, at <https://www.law.go.kr/법령/국어기본법>, 5 XII 2024.

as a cultural and tourism resource, and its digitalization. Additionally, the Committee for the Protection and Support of the Jeju Language evaluates and manages various aspects such as the development of language norms, practical language use, promotion, and educational initiatives. These efforts aim to bolster the private sector's involvement in language development and ensure the protection and enhancement of the Jeju language as a vital element of regional heritage.

The Jeju language can significantly contribute to social cohesion within the Jeju community by reinforcing a shared cultural identity. By integrating the Jeju language into the educational system, children and young people can develop a profound connection with their heritage, fostering a sense of pride and belonging. Regular use of the Jeju language in both formal and informal settings encourages communication across different generations, promoting intergenerational solidarity and the transmission of cultural values. The advocacy for bilingual practices, where Jeju language is used alongside Standard Korean, helps in maintaining cultural distinctiveness while ensuring integration into the broader Korean society. Additionally, cultural events and festivals centered around the Jeju language can serve as communal platforms for celebrating unique regional traditions, thereby strengthening community bonds. Lastly, positioning the Jeju language within the tourism sector not only raises awareness but also instils pride among locals as they share their linguistic heritage with visitors, further uniting the community around a common cultural asset.<sup>38</sup>

## EFFORTS TOWARDS LANGUAGE REUNIFICATION WITH NORTH KOREA

The Korean language exhibits pronounced divergences in its application across the demarcated territories of the Korean Peninsula, which include the Republic of Korea (South Korea) and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea). These variances are rooted in historical, geopolitical, and ideological contexts that have fostered distinct linguistic trajectories. After the Japanese occupation, both North and South Korea intensified their language purification efforts as a strategy to consolidate cultural identity. Nevertheless, the methodologies adopted by each nation have varied significantly, further accentuating linguistic disparities.

A primary area of contrast is lexical development. South Korea has shown a propensity to integrate a huge number of English words into its vocabulary, whereas North Korea has demonstrated a marked resistance to foreign lexical units, favoring the enhancement of native expressions. In particular, many of North Korea's neologisms, notably in domains such as sports, derive from Sino-Korean sources, reflecting adaptation from Chinese lexicon which is more acceptable than using English loanwords.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Kang Young-bong, "Jeju sahoe tonghapgwa jejeuo" (The Unity of Jeju's Society and the Jeju Dialect), *Tamna Munhwa*, vol. 43 (2013), pp. 39-65.

<sup>39</sup> Gwon Jaecil, "Nambukan eohwi danilhwa" (South-North Korean Vocabulary Unification), *Saegugeo-saenghwal*, vol. 25, no. 4 (2015), pp. 107-124.

From a psychological perspective, the North Korean regime employs language as an ideological instrument. The ruling party strategically utilizes linguistic constructs to disseminate political narratives and modulate public perception, highlighting the profound sociopolitical ramifications of these linguistic differences.<sup>40</sup>

Initiatives aimed at linguistic unification have been manifest in endeavors like the Joint Council of North and South Korea for the Compilation of a Unified Korean Language Dictionary. However, recent years have seen a decline in North Korean engagement in these projects, underscoring the intricate challenges inherent in linguistic reconciliation efforts.<sup>41</sup>

Despite ongoing attempts at convergence, the linguistic schism between the two Koreas persists, propelled by the asynchronous assimilation of foreign elements in South Korea and hindered by the limited inter-Korean dialogue due to North Korea's isolation. With the uncertain prospects of national reunification, the expansion of this linguistic divide appears inevitable, necessitating continued scholarly attention to this complex and evolving problem. The issue of linguistic unification encompasses all aspects of language, including pronunciation, orthography, romanization, and even details such as alphabetical order and phoneme names.<sup>42</sup> This wide-ranging endeavor highlights the complexities of aligning diverse linguistic elements, deeply intertwined with cultural identities and political ideologies.

## THE IMPACT OF NEW TECHNOLOGIES ON REGIONAL VARIETIES OF KOREAN

The impact of new technologies on regional varieties of Korean presents a fascinating research area that demonstrates how digitization and global communication are transforming the linguistic landscape. With the expansion of the internet, social media, and mobile technologies, regional dialects and linguistic varieties face new challenges and opportunities. This process not only affects language diversity in Korea but also prompts local residents and communities to focus more on preserving their linguistic identity in an increasingly interconnected world.

Glocalization highlights the critical role of dialects in preserving regional culture amidst a push for multilingual policies, challenging the uniformity imposed by standard language practices. Dialects, once threatened by policies favoring standard language, are now seen as vital assets by local governments for showcasing regional identity and boosting the economy through unique cultural expressions. As regions face

<sup>40</sup> Go Yeongeun, "Nambuk gyubeommunbeobui tongil bangan" (Unification Plans for South-North Standard Grammar), *Saegugeosaenghwal*, vol. 11, no. 1 (2001), pp. 29-45.

<sup>41</sup> Gwak Chunggu, "Nambukan coneo ijilhwawa geue gwallyeondoan myeot munje" (Language Divergence between South and North Korea and Several Related Issues), *Saegugeosaenghwal*, vol. 11, no. 1 (2001), pp. 1-27.

<sup>42</sup> S. Jeon Suta, "Seoro dareun pyogibeobui tongil bangan" (Unified Approach for Different Writing Systems), *Saegugeosaenghwal*, vol. 11, no. 1 (2001), pp. 47-60.

existential threats, there's a growing imperative to leverage the cultural and economic value of dialects as a strategy for regional revitalization and crisis management.

In Korea, there are proposals for conversion of dialects into cultural content as a strategy for both preservation and economic valorization. It advocates for the exploitation of dialects in the development of high-value cultural products utilizing One Source Multi-Use (OSMU) and Transmedia Content strategies, which adapt a singular source across multiple media formats to enhance narrative richness and facilitate a deeper understanding of the dialects' cultural roots. Consequently, this approach not only maintains the identity and historical relevance of dialects but also revitalizes local economies and elevates the cultural prominence of the regions involved.<sup>43</sup>

Dialects are increasingly being transformed into cultural content across various fields, though their potential economic impact is sometimes not fully realized due solely to the focus on their inherent meanings and values. Despite this, dialect content has shown significant success in text, visual, and performance media even in challenging conditions. Successful examples of dialect content can be found on a broad scale based on cultural industry classifications to explore future directions and developmental strategies. K-movies and K-dramas using dialects enrich character development and convey regional sentiments, albeit with challenges in dialogue delivery to audiences accustomed to standard language, underscoring the enduring value of dialects in regional and cultural authenticity.

## CONCLUSION

The examination of the dynamic relationships among language policy, regional dialects, and technological advancements reveals their significant roles in defining the linguistic landscape of South Korea. Exploring the evolution of Standard Korean, the preservation efforts for the Jeju language, and the initiatives toward linguistic reunification with North Korea, we see that language policies transcend administrative functions and are crucial for reflecting and shaping national identity and cultural coherence. The case of Jeju, highlighted by substantial linguistic preservation efforts including the development of dictionaries, textbooks, and standardized orthography, serves as a model of regional language revitalization that aligns with broader societal values.

Moreover, the impact of new technologies and the strategic use of dialects in advertising and local economies indicate a shift towards a more inclusive approach to linguistic diversity. The *National Language Basic Act* mandates proactive adaptations to changing linguistic environments and emphasizes the development and preservation of the Korean language and its regional varieties. The gradual decline in negative perceptions towards dialects, as evidenced by recent surveys, suggests a cultural shift towards valuing linguistic diversity, aligning with global trends that recognize and celebrate regional linguistic identities.

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<sup>43</sup> Bak Seongho, "Jiyeok wigi geukbogeul wihan bangeonkontencheu gyebal bangan" (Strategies for Developing Dialect Content to Overcome Regional Crisis), *Gugeomunhak*, vol. 80 (2022), pp. 265-287.

However, despite these positive strides, the standardization policies that have long favored Standard Korean continue to pose challenges for the full acceptance and integration of regional dialects in public and formal domains. The historical context of language policy in South Korea, particularly post-1945, highlights a sustained emphasis on centralization and unity, often at the expense of regional linguistic diversity. Such policies have historically marginalized dialect speakers, fostering a sense of inferiority and contributing to the decline of these language varieties.

In response, current policies and initiatives, particularly those post-2005, have begun to correct these imbalances, fostering a more equitable linguistic environment. The repositioning of dialects as valuable cultural and economic assets, useful in business names, tourism, and advertising, marks a significant transformation in public attitudes and policy. Regional dialects are no longer seen merely as relics of the past but as vital elements of South Korea's cultural heritage and as strategic resources in the global cultural economy.

As South Korea continues to navigate the complexities of modernization and globalization, the sustained effort to balance standardization with dialect preservation will be crucial. The ongoing advancements in technology and shifts in public policy and perceptions are likely to further shape this balance, necessitating continuous scholarly attention to the evolving linguistic landscape. Thus, preserving linguistic diversity, while fostering national unity and cultural identity, remains a compelling challenge and an essential endeavor for South Korea, reflecting a nuanced understanding of language as both a marker of identity and a tool for social integration and cultural expression.

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