

# Presentation of the Monograph *Introduction to Korean Language and Korean Linguistics*

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## Abstract

*Introduction to the Korean Language and Korean Linguistics* goes beyond the usual grammatical approaches to presenting the structures of a language. The presentation of the Korean language does not rely only on traditional Korean grammar but also reflects and applies the latest findings of linguistic research in interpreting Korean linguistic phenomena. In addition to an insight into the title theme, it gives a glimpse into general linguistic and sociolinguistic phenomena. It is particularly valued by its theoretical and comparative approach, which helps the reader to gain a deeper understanding of linguistic phenomena in the Korean language and to deal with similar phenomena in their own and other languages. (an excerpt from the review)

**Keywords:** Korean language, Korean linguistics, East Asia, book review

## Povzetek

*Uvod v korejski jezik in korejsko jezikoslovje* presega običajne slovnične pristope k predstavljanju jezikovnih struktur. Predstavitev korejščine se ne zanaša zgolj na tradicionalno korejsko slovnico, temveč pri razlagi korejskih jezikovnih pojavov upošteva in uporablja tudi najnovejša spoznanja jezikoslovnega raziskovanja. Poleg osrednje teme knjiga ponuja tudi vpogled v splošne jezikovne in sociolingvistične pojave. Posebej jo odlikujeta teoretični in primerjalni pristop, ki bralca popelje do globljega razumevanja jezikovnih pojavov v korejščini in soočanja s podobnimi pojavi v svojem in drugih jezikih. (odsek iz recenzije)

**Ključne besede:** korejski jezik, korejsko jezikoslovje, Vzhodna Azija, ocena knjige



## 1 Introduction

Less than 10 years have passed since the Centre for Korean Studies was established at the Department of Asian Studies of the Faculty of Arts of the University of Ljubljana (2015) and the comprehensive monograph *Uvod v korejski jezik in korejsko jezikoslovje [Introduction to Korean Language and Korean Linguistics]* is already available to the Slovenian readership.

In order to contribute to the development of Korean studies in Slovenia, the authors consciously went beyond the usual content of linguistic manuals, which focus primarily on the linguistic structure of a particular language. The linguistic analysis in this book is based on a thorough professional presentation of the past and contemporary social, cultural, and linguistic circumstances that guided the development of the Korean language and influenced its use.

Due to this concept, the work not only addresses students of Korean Studies in Slovenia but also provides researchers of various humanities and social sciences with useful information about the linguistic reality of the Korean nation divided into two countries that have been in constant conflict since the end of World War II.

The work is presented in a transparent structure, even within the chapters: After the preface (pp. 13-18), fourteen chapters (pp. 19-341) follow with three appendices (pp. 343-347). The list of used literature (pp. 349-357) is followed by a vocabulary of technical terms in Slovenian and Korean, in Roman script and with notation in Chinese characters (pp. 359-368), an index (pp. 369-378), and a presentation of authors and editors (pp. 379-380).

## 2 Contents

Tentatively, the content of the monograph could be divided into three parts: the conceptual sociolinguistic part (I), the grammar part (II), and the textual part (III).

Introductory **Part I** (Chapters I to VI) highlights selected linguistic concepts and explores the sociolinguistic image of Korean reality from a past and contemporary perspective. It is aimed to refresh the general knowledge of the language phenomena and select basic concepts to broaden the theoretical bases for understanding the Korean language structures. It discusses the origin and development of the Korean language

and its distribution, genetic ties, and contacts with other Trans-Eurasian languages. Over time and comparatively, the Korean script is presented. The language policy of the two Koreas is briefly confronted. Characteristics of the Korean lexicon are explored and variation in Korean is touched upon. This part concludes with a chapter on expressing respect, a delicate feature in the Korean language where the interaction between the language forms and the social code is strongly expressed.

**Chapter I** “Buildup: Basic concepts related to language” (author Andrej Bekeš) is designed as a theoretical framework for understanding linguistic phenomena that shed light on linguistic structures specific to Korean and are discussed in more detail in later chapters on specific grammatical topics. Given the extremely diverse expression of modal meanings in the Korean language, the author dwells on the analyses of aspects and functions of the language and the fundamental types of meanings (according to Halliday (1978)). By presenting linguistic functions and highlighting the interaction between language and the context of communication, a theoretical framework is drawn for exploring the features of the rich system of addressing and expressing respect in the Korean language. Particular attention is paid to the interpretation of concepts such as the language sign (the connection between the vocal presentation and the mental presentation of a named entity) and double articulation (also the duality of patterning and double segmentation: according to Martinet (1960) a mechanism that allows the formation of any number of sentences from a finite number of basic units of a language, phonemes, or words). Both are relevant to understanding the process of development of the Korean Hangeul script (from the adaptation of Chinese characters to the introduction of alphabetic script), which is discussed in detail in Chapter III.

**Chapter II** “About Korea and Korean” (by Andrej Bekeš) tells of the prevalence of Korean as a first language of about 85,500,000 speakers, of which 26,000,000 in the North, Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) and 52,000,000 in the South, Republic of Korea (RK), and about 7,500,000 speakers worldwide, with the largest diasporas in China and the United States each with 2,500,000 speakers, and Japan with 8,250,000 speakers. The origin and development of the Korean language are discussed extensively. Its beginnings can be placed in the 1st millennium BC, its development being influenced by two language-contact situations, the contact of Korean with related Altai languages on the one hand, and the long-standing, close

contact with speakers of otherwise genetically unrelated Chinese on the other hand, which is particularly evident in the similarity of vocabulary.

The first contact with related languages, including Japanese, is evidenced by a series of common features that the Korean language shares with the Altai branch of the Trans-Eurasian<sup>1</sup> languages. Among the basics are agglutination, vowel harmony, characteristic word order (SOV and GAN), and non-appearance of the phonemes [l] and [r] at the beginning of a word. However, knowledge of the origin of the Korean language and its related ties, especially to the Japanese language, is still incomplete. The dilemma is caused by the deficiency of linguistic material from the early period of the development of the Korean language on the one hand and Japan's colonial policy, which attributed the same origin to both languages, Korean and Japanese, despite the objections of Korean linguists on the other. With a brief presentation of the outcomes of interdisciplinary archaeological, genetic, and linguistic studies, the author highlights the difficulties in identifying kinship relationships between Korean and other languages, pointing to the latest findings in this field.

Another linguistic contact that influenced the development of the Korean language – that is, contact with Chinese – is better documented. The intertwined historical development with China and the close cultural contacts between the two peoples have been reflected in the development of the Korean language, particularly in the process of forming the Korean script.

**Chapter III** (author Andrej Bekeš) reveals the path to the origin of the Korean Hangeul script. In the introduction, the definition of a script as a system of signs that “encodes another system of signs – a language” is given (p. 43), and a presentation of the criteria for classifying scripts according to the language units they record. The reader learns about two basic types of scripts and their subspecies: the earlier pleremic scripts, when the units of language encoded by script signs generate meaning (morphemes, words), and the later cenemic scripts, when the units encoded by script signs do not generate meaning (phonetic or phonological units). The Korean Hangeul script is classified as a cenemic script. It is an alphabetic script that, like Cyrillic and Roman, registers the sounds and phonemes.

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<sup>1</sup> Instead of an earlier classification into the Altai family of related languages, which “considers Korean and Japanese as a kind of external companion” (p. 30), the author is closer to a more recent classification into the broader Trans-Eurasian family of languages (according to the linguist Martine Robbeets (2017)).

The narrative of the development of the Hangeul, its internal structure and its secondary structure is placed in the general information about the development of the scripts. Historically, writing has only appeared on a few occasions as an independent invention. One of the four areas of the original, independent writing system is China, where script was invented about 3,500 years ago. Due to the colonial influence of China, it began to spread into Korea before the end of the first millennium BC. Despite adapting to the needs of the Korean language, Classical Chinese remained a prestigious written language in Korea until the 15th century, when a new alphabetic script, Hangeul, intended for the people, was introduced by proclamation. At the same time, Classical Chinese remained the official language of Korea until the late 19th century, when it was gradually replaced by “the Korean language written in a mixed style, with Chinese characters and Hangeul” (p. 59). Hangeul did not fully dominate public communication until after World War II. Nevertheless, especially in professional writings, it is still possible to find a bracketed entry in Chinese characters.

The significance of the unification of written and spoken Korean with the introduction of the Hangeul is evidenced by the fact that the Annunciation Day of the New Alphabet (supposedly October 9, 1446) is celebrated today in both Koreas. In the south, RK, it is named “Hangeul Day” and in the north, the DPRK, “Joseongeul Day”.<sup>2</sup>

Although **Chapter IV** (authored by Kang Byoung Yoong) is entitled “Language and language policy in North Korea”, it is a comparative study of language planning also in South Korea.

After the establishment of the two Korean states (1948), the previously unified language policy began to split in two directions and two standard languages emerged. South Korea maintained an established standard based on the language of the old Korean capital, Seoul, while North Korea proclaimed a new standard, the so-called 'cultivated language', based on the language of the North Korean capital, Pyongyang (in 1966). The language policies of the two countries differ mainly in terms of language ideology. In South Korea, a more liberal, permissive, model favoring borrowing from other languages and linguistic creativity is applied. North Korea, on the other hand, has established a conservative, authoritative model of language policy, which directs development toward the original “people’s” language, reluctant to adopt from other languages, and establishes a vocabulary

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<sup>2</sup>Joseon Kingdom of Korea (1392–1897).

appropriate to North Korean ideology. As a result, the fairly uniform language of the two Koreas begins to differ. Especially in terms of vocabulary, there are many discrepancies in several areas that the speakers from both countries can no longer communicate with ease. The chapter ends with a call for the reconciliation of relations between the two countries and the striving for language and cultural unity.

**Chapter V** (authored by Kang Byoung Yoong) entitled “The vocabulary of the Korean language” presents the classification of Korean lexemes according to etymology, word class, and meaning. In the second part, the word change, dropping, and reappearing of Korean words is shown, through the time perspective, especially in the last century. Using examples from geographical and social varieties, the socially appropriate use of language is illustrated, the vocabulary of written and spoken language is compared, and factors that dictate the choice of words for respectful speech are pointed out. Korean slang, euphemisms, and jargon are introduced and standard and non-standard forms are confronted.

**Chapter VI** (by Kang Byoung Yoong) “Expressing respect” (usually related to as “honorific speech”) describes how the social hierarchy, characteristic of both Koreas, is reflected through language forms or through the use of language forms. In addition to establishing the proper relationship with the interlocutor, expressing respect requires a profound knowledge of social relationships and context that dictate the explicit use of a given language form (words, syntactic forms). Strict social etiquette dictates not only the use of appropriate language forms to indicate the relationship between the speaker and the interlocutor but also the social position of others, even absent participants of a conversation. The effect of using these linguistic means can be positive (respect, distance, elevation of the status of the interlocutor), neutral, or negative (reduction of the status of the speaker, shyness, contempt). Even when the learner has mastered the Korean language as a means of expressing respect, choosing the appropriate forms remains a complicated task.

After presenting the basics and meaning of expressing respect, the work focuses on three types of respectful speech: expressing respect for the subject in a sentence, expressing respect for the object or recipient of the action (also called “humble speech” because it diminishes the importance of the speaker), and expressing respect for the interlocutor.

The first two types highlight differences in status, the first by elevating the status of a superior person, and the second by emphasizing the irrelevance of the inferior person (the speaker). Both kinds of respect can be expressed in a variety of language forms, from the addition of prefixes to a verbal or adjective base, through the use of particles to designate a subject or object, to various lexical means. At the same time, a respectful form may refer directly to the subject himself, and indirectly, respect can be expressed by using appropriate forms to denote “concrete and abstract things” that a person with a higher status possesses or expresses.

The third type of respectful speech, similar to the address systems (vi: ti) in many European languages, indicates a state of proximity or distance/formality between the speakers or politeness and respect towards the interlocutor. It is expressed with an appropriate verb or adjective ending.

The second part of the book, **Part II** (Chapters VII to XII) includes a presentation of the basic characteristics of Korean phonology, morphology, and syntax.

**Chapter VII** “Phonetics and phonology of the Korean language” (author Eva Vučkovič) concentrates on the presentation of sounds of the Korean language. This complex area is introduced by an explanation of general concepts and of the process of sound formation together with a description of the speech organs involved in this process. The focus is on the Korean phonological system, the vowel and consonant system, the peculiarities of pronunciation of individual sounds, and the building blocks of syllables. Phonological changes are highlighted, such as the replacement of phonemes and the vowel harmony of phonemes, which in Korean are closely related to both morphological and syntactic phenomena. The chapter concludes with a presentation of the main approaches to transliterating the Korean script into Roman. Of the more than 20 modes, applied today in Korea and elsewhere, three are presented in more detail: MR (by McCune and Reischauer), the oldest transliteration method dating back to 1939, the 1967 transliteration system created at Yale University, and the revised transliteration system, RR (Revised Romanization), introduced in South Korea in 2000. The latter converges and simplifies the MR and Yale systems.

**Chapter VIII** “Morphology” (author Maša Žbogar) presents the basic features of Korean morphology, starting with the definition of morpheme and the classification of morphemes in the Korean language. The diversity

of morphemes and their well-defined function is underlined, especially in grammatical morphemes that express specific meanings such as time, respectability, etc. Follows the definition of the word and the categorization of the word classes according to form, function, and meaning. At the same time, attention is drawn to the specific difficulties in distinguishing word classes in the Korean language, which originate from its agglutination nature and are also known by other agglutination languages. The dilemma of delimitation of certain adjectives and verbs is highlighted; attention is drawn to the inconsistent definition of endings, which in addition to particles, some authors treat as a special word type, while others do not. In the description of Korean word formation, two processes are presented, either from a root, which can be linked to another root for this purpose – the process of composition – or by affixes (prefixes and suffixes) – the process of derivation.

**Chapter IX** “A brief overview of the main features of Korean syntax” (author Andrej Bekeš) outlines the basic features of this linguistic field, starting with the basic features of the word order. The richness and role of particles and endings at all levels of the sentence are particularly highlighted. The absence of numbers, gender, and persons in Korean is pointed out and an explanation is given as to how the meanings expressed by these non-existent Korean grammatical categories are framed. The chapter dwells on sentence elements, the so-called clause building blocks, and describes the properties of the fundamental elements, subject, object, and predicate.

The following chapters, Chapter X “The structure of the dictum – predicate, arguments, supplements” (author Andrej Bekeš) and Chapter XI “The structure of the modus” (author Andrej Bekeš) deal with the key components in the semantic-syntactic structure of the sentence directly related to the process of communication, and through the act of speech intellectual and emotional spheres of life. Dictus represents a factual or imaginary non-linguistic condition or event; it refers to the speaker’s knowledge or prediction of the situation. Modus, on the other hand, expresses a subjective attitude towards what is being said and thus indicates how strongly the speaker trusts or believes in the representation of non-linguistic reality.

**Chapter X** on dictum first outlines the structure of the dictum of a simple sentence and explains the role of individual sentence elements, starting with the predicate, which plays a fundamental role here together with the sentence elements that stand in front of it. Chapter describes the types of predicates and presents the joining of sentence

elements/participant roles to the predicate. Proceeding from Tesnière's (1959/2015) definition of the structure of the sentence, such as actant vs. circumstant, modern linguistic approach and terminology, based on analogy with logic is applied (argument vs adjunct). Actants (arguments) are necessary to complete the meaning of a given full verb, whereas circumstants (adjuncts) represent additional optional information, that is, information that is not essential to completing the meaning of the verb. This is followed by an analytical presentation of the subject, where in Korean an unambiguous definition is not quite simple. In an extensive description, the peculiarities of the passive and the causative in the Korean language are given, and various ways of expanding the fundamental building blocks of the sentence are presented. In the conclusion are given the basic types of simple sentences and the specifics of constructions with a double-nominative (NOM\_NOM), which many linguists consider a unique feature of Korean and Japanese. The author bases his claims on the recent research, views, and definitions of various Korean authors and also sheds critical light on their findings, thus going far beyond the approaches of traditional Korean grammars.

**Chapter XI** describes the structure of the modus. It is introduced by the explanation that the modus is expressed primarily by the elements that stand behind the predicate basis and refer to the certainty of the speaker about what is said and to his attitude toward the interlocutor. The categories of time and aspect are highlighted, which the author places somewhere between dictum and modus. The linguistic forms that express time and aspect are described and their placement in a sentence is explained. The described Korean present, past and future and their meanings are confronted with the time categories in Slovene. Aspect indicates the duration or type of temporal activity; the chapter deals with the progressive/imperfective aspect (when the activity is still in progress, it is not completed) and perfect aspect (when the form used says the action is completed). While the progressive/imperfective aspect in Korean is expressed by a suffix added to the verb base, perfection is expressed indirectly, it is understood from the context.

The chapter closes with a presentation of the core of the modus, with a discussion of the category of mood, its most typical meanings, and the linguistic forms that express these meanings (e. g. guess, wonder, desire, initiative, question, etc.). Modality is a very branched category in Korean, expressed by modal endings and modal adverbs.

**Chapter XII** “Multi-clause sentence” (author Maša Žbogar) expands the story of the basic structure of the sentence by presenting multi-clause sentences, which the Korean grammar divides into sentences with dependent clauses and conjunctive sentences. Ways of sentence extension with dependent clauses and with coordinate and subordinate clauses are presented.

The final part of the book, **Part III** (chapters XIII and XIV) is a textual set that reflects the author’s belief that the study of language does not end with syntax and “the primary aspect of language is speech or discourse” (p. 18).

**Chapter XIII** “The role of discourse particles in Korean from the point of view of the text” (author Andrej Bekeš) defines the role of text particles from the point of view of “connecting phenomena at the sentence level with the co-text and also with the broader context of communication” (p. 325). The basic characteristics of text particles and their role in text structuring are highlighted. In particular, the discourse particle *eun/neun* is highlighted, which “marks the whole unit beside which it stands as a theme or a contrasting element” (p. 316). This is illustrated in **Chapter XIV** “Case study – Theme in narrative and dialogue” (author Andrej Bekeš) by demonstration of the use of the text particle *eun/neun*. The importance of researching the textual role of individual aspects of grammatical phenomena in Korean is underlined, not only for an in-depth understanding of these phenomena but also from the perspective of the developments in the area of didactics of the Korean language.

In addition to the explanations already richly furnished with examples, the reader finds in the section **Appendices** a series of examples of short passive and causative forms, which illuminate the chapter on the structure of the dictum (Chapter X), and the original text of the narrative Sun and Moon, transcribed into Roman script and translated into Slovenian, which was previously analyzed in the chapter on the theme in narrative and dialogue (Chapter XIV).

Further information on the presented topic offers a list of explored literature and a glossary of used terms. The latter contains mainly linguistic terms in Slovene and Korean with notation in Hangeul, in Roman alphabet, and, according to their frequent use in professional texts, also in Chinese characters. Thus, the consistent approach of bringing the reader closer to Korean through the narrative “from the general to the specific”, which is applied throughout the monograph, is meaningfully rounded up. The

transparency of the material is supported by a subject index; at the end, the authors and editors of the monograph are briefly introduced, who, individually as well as a team, contributed to the presentation of the complex topic of the Korean language and linguistics to the Slovenian reader.

### **3 Conclusion**

Introduction to the Korean Language and Korean Linguistics goes beyond the usual grammatical approaches to presenting the structures of a language. The presentation of the Korean language does not rely only on traditional Korean grammar but also reflects and applies the latest findings of linguistic research in the interpretation of Korean linguistic phenomena. In addition to an insight into the title theme, it opens up a glimpse into general linguistic and sociolinguistic phenomena. It is particularly valued by its theoretical and comparative approach, which helps the reader to gain a deeper understanding of linguistic phenomena in the Korean language and to deal with similar phenomena in their own and other languages. In the spirit of the saying "You can never understand one language until you understand at least two"<sup>3</sup>, the work on Korean language structures relies on the general linguistic essence and illuminates linguistic phenomena in Korean with comparable or completely different phenomena in other languages. For the Slovenian reader, comparative examples from the Slovenian language are particularly valuable. Given the inspiring atmosphere that springs from the contributions, minor flaws (typing errors, occasional syntax slips) are easily overlooked.

My first contact with the Korean language dates back to 1989, when my husband and I spent 14 days in North Korea at the invitation of the Juche Academy (Nećak, 1992). About ten years later, I (again with my husband) visited South Korea, this time at the invitation of the Samsung Dog Rescue Center. I got a Korean dictionary in North Korea and a Korean grammar in South Korea. In both countries, I was struck by the high awareness of the importance of their own language and the pride in its historicity. With such attitudes prevailing, the widespread literacy and high level of education of the population in both Koreas do not come as a surprise. They can be considered a natural consequence of a well-defined and consistent

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<sup>3</sup> Herbert Geoffrey Willans.

language policy that promotes respect for one's own language and the self-confidence of its speakers.

A quarter of a century after my first contact with the Korean language, I received an invitation from the head of the Korean Centre, Prof. Shigemori Bučar, to present a monograph on Korean language and linguistics, it seemed like a strange coincidence, a small joke of fate. I was asked to report on a highly professional work, which by providing information about the Korean language, so distant and different from Slovenian and many other languages in general, not only promotes Korean in Slovenia; by illuminating Korean linguistic realities and language structures from a broader theoretical and comparative perspective, it calls attention of professional readers from both sides, Slovenian and Korean, inviting them to further discussion. Translating the monograph into one of the languages with a wider range of communication could also stimulate broader professional considerations.

I am grateful for this opportunity to meet with the Korean language again. I wish the Center for Korean Studies at the Department of Asian Studies at the Faculty of Arts UL every success in spreading knowledge about Korean history, society, culture, and language, and in its endeavors for a constructive dialogue between the two Koreas.

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