

Language Purism in Korea today*

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0. Introduction

In this paper, we will discuss Korea's experience with language purism, especially as it relates to written or literary Korean. Since the advent of language purism in Korea more or less coincides with the beginning of her modernization, we will be talking mostly about twentieth century Korea. Although we will have occasion to refer to North Korea, our discussion will relate exclusively to South Korea unless otherwise indicated. This limitation is due largely to the limited nature of our access to data relating to North Korea.

We will begin our discussion with a look at the sociopolitical context that has helped foster language purism in Korea today. Here we will consider some of the major participants in the Korean language purification movement with specific reference to their roles in the advancement of Korean language purism.

We will then consider the rhetoric that Korea's language purists have used in justifying their cause. That is, we will here concern ourselves with the rationales that Korea's purists have resorted to in their advocacy of a purer Korean language.

Following this discussion of the rhetoric of language purism in Korea, we will dwell at some length on such domains of language as are affected by purification. As we shall see, all domains of language are subject to puristic scrutiny although certain domains are more or less so than others.

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In the next section, we will deal with aspects of the implementation phase of the language purification movement in Korea. Here we will talk specifically about the strategies frequently employed in Korea for language purification and the outcomes that these strategies and other variables have led to.

Then follows a section devoted to reverse purification, i.e. purification of foreign languages contaminated by Korean sources. We will show here that this contamination is detrimental to communication between Korean and non-Korean users of the foreign languages in question. We will also argue that reverse purification finds its main justification in its contribution to better international communication and that it can best be achieved through a qualitative upgrading of foreign-language teaching.

The final section of this paper is in the nature of a critique of language purism, as it is currently practiced in Korea. This section will be followed by a short annotated bibliography on language purism in Korea, which can serve as a guide to further reading for outsiders with an interest in Korea's language purification movement.

1. Sociopolitical Context

The recent history of Korea appears to throw considerable light on the advent of language purism in present-day Korea. This section will deal with some major factors in the recent history of Korea that have combined to produce a sociopolitical context that is conducive to the birth and growth of the language purification movement in Korea.

1.1. Waning of Chinese Influence

As is well known, Korea had long been in the shadow of China until rather recently. This Chinese influence in Korea, which was especially pervasive during the Yi Dynasty (1392~1910), suddenly began to wane around the turn of the century, more or less simultaneously with the Chinese defeat in the Sino-Japanese War (1894~1895).

With the Chinese shadow so omnipresent for much of her history, the bulk of Korea's traditional literature was rendered and preserved in classical Chinese. So were virtually all major publications and documents, both private and public. Furthermore, all government examinations, including the

higher civil and military service examinations, were essentially examinations of competence in classical literary Chinese. This dominance of classical Chinese in Korea continued century after century right down to the fall of the Yi Dynasty in 1910.

Thus Chinese characters, as used in classical literary Chinese, had long been the only important medium of writing in Korea. Under these circumstances, the Korean alphabet Hangul, invented in the fifteenth century as a substitute for the difficult Chinese characters, was relegated to the harem section of Korean society. Suffice it to say here that Yi Dynasty Koreans had to acquire an excellent command of classical literary Chinese if they aspired to achieve anything of significance.

Given this historical context, the waning of Chinese influence in Korea is of immense interest to students of language purism in Korea. For the first time in centuries, Koreans were able to enjoy a fair measure of liberation from the yoke of classical literary Chinese. They finally found themselves in a position where they could win literary independence from China, so to speak, by moving away from classical Chinese toward Korea's native linguistic resources, including Hangul.

It is to be understood in this light that the Korean Language Research Institute was established in 1907 by the Yi Dynasty under its Ministry of Education. This Institute had as its mandate the study of Korean orthography, word-formation, and syntax for educational usage.

1.2. Japanese Colonial Rule

Japanese colonial rule (1910~1945) figures as a major factor in any discussion of language purism in Korea today. With her annexation of Korea in 1910, Japan effectively established herself, and thus replaced China, as the ultimate arbiter of all important affairs affecting Korea.

In the first years of her rule in Korea, Japan allowed the use of Korean as a medium of instruction in the Korean school system. In a Copernican turn from this policy, however, the Japanese colonial authorities soon banned Korean not just as a medium of education but also as one of official communication.

The Japanese Colonial Government evidently pursued this policy of Korean-language annihilation as part of its scheme to assimilate and absorb

Korea into the Japanese Empire. This policy backfired, however, as it only served to intensify Korea's hostility toward Japan and awaken the Korean people to the grave danger of extinction that faced their language.

It was under these conditions that many members of the Korean Language Society were imprisoned in the 1930s and 1940s for their activities related to the purification and preservation of the Korean language. The Society declared its celebrated principles of "Unified Korean Orthography" and "Standard Korean" in 1933 and 1936 respectively, in the midst of Japanese attempts to eradicate the Korean language.

Japanese colonial rule also bears on language purism in Korea in a more straightforward way. Naturally enough, Japanese words came flooding into Korean during the thirty-six years of Japanese rule in Korea. This wholesale influx of Japanese words into Korean was then and is still regarded as a serious threat to the purity and integrity of the Korean language.

1. 3. Birth of an Independent and Democratic Korea

Korea's liberation from Japan in 1945 is of direct relevance to the growth and development of language purism in Korea. So is the birth of a democratic Korea in 1948.

The birth of an independent Korea provided a perfect sociopolitical climate for the development of Korean as a national language. In fact, the immediate post-liberation years saw Koreans in many walks of life clamoring for a unique national language that is completely independent of foreign elements such as Chinese characters and Japanese loans.

The subsequent birth of a democratic Korea made a universal elementary education an urgent necessity almost overnight. All Koreans somehow had to be made literate in a hurry if they were to function adequately as citizens of a new-born democracy.

This situation called for a writing system that was far less difficult than Chinese characters. This gave a tremendous impetus to the already existing demand from some purist quarters for the ouster of Chinese characters in favor of the exclusive use of Hangul. For Korea's very own alphabet Hangul, which had hitherto been languishing in the shadow of Chinese characters, was precisely the kind of writing system the country needed.

The democratization of Korea has also necessitated the democratization

of its language.

It is in this context that the Korean Government has recently been trying to rid its documents of turns of expression that are either not egalitarian in tone or not readily comprehensible to the average citizen.

1.4. Enhanced Mobility

With the recent development of transportation and communication in Korea, contact between different parts or segments of Korean society has been rapidly increasing. This has led to an unprecedented intermingling of the country's diverse dialects, which in turn has resulted in a serious dialectal contamination of standard Korean. Claiming that serious damage has already been done, many Korean intellectuals are urging that this situation be immediately rectified.

1.5. Expanding International Relations

Korea's ever expanding international relations also deserve mention in connection with our discussion here. With her very survival as a nation hinging on friendly and cooperative relations with other countries, Korea has been expanding and diversifying her international relations over the last forty years or so.

This expansion of Korea's foreign relations has inevitably brought into the Korean language large numbers of foreign/loan words. This large-scale "intrusion" of words from other languages is regarded with alarm by many purists as posing a threat to the purity and security of the Korean language.

1.6. National Division

The division of the Korean peninsula into North and South Korea since 1945 has led to a bifurcation of the Korean language. The two Koreas now have two separate standard "languages," which are mutually intelligible and yet differ quite noticeably in lexicon. The two Koreas also have two different writing systems with the North using Hangul only and the South a combination of Hangul and Chinese characters.

Should the country be reunified, the two standard languages with the two different writing systems must be reconciled in one way or another. This reconciliation will almost certainly involve a process of language

standardization and purification. Some Korean linguists are already beginning to suggest that this process can and should get under way now in preparation for eventual national reunification.

1.7. Vacillation in Language Policy

The Korean Government has shifted from one writing-medium policy to another. At one time, the Government leaned quite heavily toward the exclusive use of Hangul. After years of this policy, the Government suddenly changed course and opted for a combination of Hangul and Chinese characters. It then reverted to the Hangul-only policy only to shift back to the combination policy a few years later.

This policy vacillation has given rise to a state of flux and confusion on the Korean educational scene for quite some time. As a result, those who started to school after 1945 generally experience varying degrees of difficulty with Chinese characters, for example, when they read daily newspapers. Thus should this policy vacillation continue, consumer-sensitive purification (see 5.2.2.) may eventually force Chinese characters out of use.

2. Major Participants

The Korean language purification movement has had many active participants, individual or otherwise. In this section, we will take a look at these participants with specific reference to the roles they have played in the movement.

2.1. Individual Scholars and Educators

We will discuss here three of the most outstanding individual advocates of language purism in modern Korea: Chu Si-Gyung, Choi Hyun-Bai, and Huh Woong.

2.1.1. Chu Si-Gyung

Perhaps Chu (1876~1914) was the first major Korean linguist to call on the nation to join in the purification of the Korean language. He devoted his life to the study, teaching, and popularization of a pure and authentic Korean language. He did this at a time when all Korean society regarded classical literary Chinese as the only respectable repository of writing and

scholarship.

Chu demonstrated the superiority of Korea's native linguistic resources, including Hangul, through his publications on the orthography, pronunciation, and grammar of the Korean language. He also wrote for the Korean Independence Daily four editorials, all in 1897, appealing to the nation at large for the adoption of Hangul as the sole legitimate medium of writing in Korea.

2. 1. 2. **Choi Hyun-Bai**

One of Chu's students, Choi (1884~1970) also devoted much of his life to the advocacy of a pure and authentic Korean language. Like Chu, Choi also argued that a pure and authentic Korean language was predicated, among other things, on the use of Hangul as the only medium of writing in Korea.

He also preached that a pure Korean language should be completely clear of all foreign matter, especially Japanese and Sino-Korean words. He preached that the Korean language would be restored to its original purity and integrity if all foreign elements in it were replaced by their pure Korean equivalents. Choi may very well be the fountainhead of the fundamentalist purist camp in Korea that to this day demands that all foreign elements be weeded out in the name of a purer Korean language.

2. 1. 3. **Huh Woong**

One of Choi's students, Huh(1919~) is the torchbearer of fundamentalist purism in Korea today. As president of the Hangul Society, he spearheads the purist movement for the adoption of Hangul as the sole legitimate medium of writing in Korea. Also a prolific contributor to journals, magazines, and newspapers, he employs all his writings as a vehicle for his gospel of Korean language purism.

2. 1. 4. **Other Educators**

Countless other scholars and educators have joined in as individual crusaders for the purist cause. Of these other individual crusaders, those teaching at elementary and secondary schools have often set inspiring examples for other purist individuals and groups.

According to the Society for Korean Language Education, some eighty-five (micro-)purification projects have been carried out at elementary and secondary schools throughout Korea over a fifteen-year period, that is, from 1960 to 1975. The titles of these projects include: (1) Language Purification through the Teaching of Writing, (2) Purification of Student Slang and Jargon, and (3) Eradication of Foreign and Loan Words.

2. 2. Learned Societies

A fair number of learned societies have taken part in the Korean language purification movement. We will talk about some of these societies below with specific reference to their puristic activities.

2. 2. 1. Hangul Society

The most assertive purist group in Korea today is the Hangul Society, whose purist activities have been directed or coordinated by Choi and Huh (See 2. 1.). Predictably enough, the Society's language purification movement agrees with the two scholars' individual crusades for purism on all points of substance. Thus the Society attaches the utmost importance to its crusade for Hangul as the sole official medium of writing in Korea. It also stresses the eradication of foreign/loan elements as a means of purifying the Korean language.

In order to promote the cause of Korean language purism, the Hangul Society periodically sponsors workshops for Korean-language teachers, seminars on Korean linguistics, and Hangul writing contests for students. Besides publishing a newsletter loaded with purism-related information, it also maintains an active lobby for Korean language purification.

2. 2. 2. Society for Korean Language Education

Compared to the Hangul Society, the Society for Korean Language Education is a rather conservative purist group. Unlike the Hangul Society, this Society does not call for an outright ban on either Chinese characters or Sino-Korean words.

The Society for Korean Language Education directs most of its purification efforts at the removal from standard Korean of such impurities as foreignisms, dialectalisms, and indecent language like cheap slang. It also

attempts to restore purity and decency to the Korean language by doing repairs to its honorific system, which it claims is rapidly falling apart.

2. 2. 3. Other Learned Societies

Of the other linguistic and literary societies involved in Korean language purification, the following may be noted as worthy of mention here: (1) the Korean Language and Literature Society, (2) the Linguistic Society of Korea, (3) the Society of Korean Literary Writers, (4) the Society of Korean Radio and Television Authors, (5) the Society for the Teaching of Korean Language and Literature, and (6) the Korean Society for Research in Language and Literature.

These societies, taken individually, are not quite as formidable as the Hangeul Society or the Society for Korean Language Education. They could collectively act as a powerful pressure group, however, as they did when they pressured the Government into establishing the Korean Language Research Institute in 1984.

2. 3. Mass Media Establishment

With its heavy reliance on language, the Korean mass media establishment, understandably enough, is actively involved in the language purification movement. We will here discuss some of the more important language purification activities undertaken by the various branches of the Korean mass media.

2. 3. 1. Newspapers and Magazines

Newspapers and magazines often feature articles on language purification. The Hankuk Ilbo Daily, for one, carried in 1984 a long series of articles designed to help purify the language of etiquette. It also occasionally carries articles calling for the eradication of indecent language, dialectalisms, and foreignisms. Newspaper copy editors also participate in deliberations on matters pertaining to language purism in the areas of orthography, Koreanization of foreign words, and Romanization of Korean words.

2. 3. 3. Radio and Television

The Korean Broadcasting System airs three language purification programs.

Comprised of a daily one-minute prime-time television program, a weekly thirty-minute television program, and a daily three-minute radio program, they deal mostly with matters of usage and style using examples from novels, poems, and other literary pieces.

In addition to these broadcast programs, the Korean Broadcasting System also conducts through its Korean Language Purification Committee an in-house purification program for its employees, mostly its announcers, reporters, and scriptwriters. Although in-house, this program has national consequences, as the results thereof are reflected in all of the System's programming.

The Korean Broadcasting System also conducts occasional purification workshops in major Korean cities, mostly for elementary and secondary school teachers. In June, 1985, the Korean Broadcasting System staged a novel campaign for the purification of the language of pop songs. Based on an error analysis of some Korean pop songs, the campaign took the form of a workshop for pop artists. The organizers of this campaign felt that language errors in pop songs are highly contagious and thus need to be rooted out.

2. 4. Government-Related Organizations

The Korean Government is also an active participant in the language purification movement with the Ministry of Education as its nerve center. The Ministry coordinates Government-initiated purification programs with assistance and cooperation from various Government agencies and national academies/institutes.

2. 4. 1. Government Agencies

The various agencies of the Government submit to the Ministry of Education lists of words that they have targeted for purification. The Korean Language Screening Committee at the Ministry then deliberates and passes judgment on these lists, the results of which are sent back to the respective agencies in the form of recommendations on how each item on the lists is to be purified (see 5. 1. 1. below).

2. 4. 2. Academies and Institutes

The Ministry of Education often turns to national academies and insti-

tutes for expertise on matters pertaining to purification. Of these, the following three are under the direct jurisdiction of the Ministry: (1) the Korean Academy of Sciences, (2) the Academy of Korean Studies, and (3) the Korean Language Research Institute.

Often on their own initiative and sometimes at the request of the Ministry, these academies and institutes conduct research and hold public hearings on matters relating to language purification. Among the themes they treat most frequently are (1) Koreanization, (2) Romanization, (3) orthography, (4) the Korean alphabet Hangul vs. Chinese characters, and (5) foreignisms and language purism.

3. Target Domains of Language

In this section, we will concern ourselves with such domains of language as are affected by language purism. They are the domains of use, structure, medium, skill, and formality.

3.1. Domains of Use

Here we will discuss different functional categories of language use that are subject to purification.

3.1.1. Language of Government

Government documents have long been under critical examination for purification purposes. Purists have often demanded that the following impurities be expunged from government documents: (1) difficult Chinese characters and Sino-Korean expressions, (2) other foreign elements, especially those of Japanese origin, and (3) authoritarian turns of expression.

3.1.2. Language of Education

The language of education, as used in textbooks, is perhaps the most thoroughly purified language in Korea today. Purified in the name of universal literacy and education, textbooks steer clear of such impurities as foreignisms and dialectalisms. They also use only a bare minimum of Chinese characters, which are always parenthesized following their Hangul renderings.

3. 1. 3. Language of the Mass Media

The language of the mass media also tends to be highly purified. Impure elements almost always get blue-penciled in accordance with the purification guidelines recommended by the Government, learned societies, and in-house purification committees. Evidently to better accommodate their readers, many magazines now ask their contributors to minimize Chinese characters and other problematic foreignisms.

3. 1. 4. Language of Literature

The language of literature is also subject to similar purification. Works of literature tend to be clear of Chinese characters. Novels and plays avoid Chinese characters almost completely while poems and essays do sometimes use them moderately. This may be because the readers of poems and essays tend to be more exclusive and erudite (and thus better versed in Chinese characters) than those of novels and plays.

3. 1. 5. Language of Learning

The language of scholarship, science, and technology is also frequently targeted for purification. There is currently in every field of specialization a call for terminological purification through removal of non-Korean terms, especially those of Japanese origin.

For example, there is a fairly persistent demand in Korea today for purification of linguistics terminology. The term "transformational-generative grammar," for one, has at least five Korean equivalents, which is extremely confusing, to say the least. At least one of these five Korean equivalents is thought to be Japanese in origin, and some purists are demanding that this Japanese-tainted equivalent be immediately struck out of the Korean language.

3. 1. 6. Language of the Trades

The language of such trades as carpentry and mining is so heavily "contaminated" with Japanese words that outsiders and newly initiated members find it almost totally unintelligible. With the situation so bad, not just purists but also members of the trades in question seem to agree that

the language of these trades is in need of a thorough purification.

3.1.7. Language of Religion

The language of religion, as used in the holy scriptures, apparently needs to be purified, especially if they are to reach the largest possible audience. This may lie at the root of the ongoing endeavor of the Korean Buddhist leadership to produce annotated Hangul versions of the traditional all-Chinese Buddhist scriptures, which are literally all Chinese to even the more erudite Korean intellectuals.

Interestingly enough, the Christian Bible has apparently been published in Hangul all along, without using a single Chinese character. This must have resulted from the desire of the Christian church to come into contact with the maximum number of people in Korea. This completely purified language of the Bible may account, in no small measure, for the immense following that Christianity enjoys in Korea today.

3.1.8. Language of Advertising

Advertisers similarly purify their language voluntarily in an effort to better accommodate their consumers. Thus signboards and billboards, which used to be fairly overrun with Chinese characters until about two decades ago, are now almost entirely free of them. Admittedly, advertisements in newspapers and magazines still flash a fair number of Chinese characters, apparently as an attention-getting device. However, even these advertisements appear to be using fewer and fewer Chinese characters, a development which may be inevitable given the need for them to appeal to the largest possible number of readers.

Trademarks and brand names, especially those on articles of clothing, have become infested with Western or Western-sounding words. This tendency has been under heavy fire from all purist quarters for quite some time.

3.1.9. Language of Entertainment

The language of entertainment sometimes gets targeted for purification, as in the case of the pop music purification campaign referred to in 2.3.2. The language of comedy also occasionally comes in for puristic criticism

in the Korean press. Currently the Korean Broadcasting System is working with a university in Seoul on upgrading broadcast comedy, which supposedly includes refining the language of comedy. The main issue in the purification of entertainment language seems to center around the question of its decency.

3. 2. Domains of Structure

In structural terms, we may speak of at least four domains, i.e. those of phonology, lexicon, syntax, and semantics. As we shall see below, all these structural domains are targeted for purification in Korea today.

3. 2. 1. Phonological Domain

Purists often demand that the pronunciation of standard Korean be decontaminated of dialectal and other non-standard elements. They frequently point out that broadcast language, which is especially contagious, is becoming increasingly polluted by dialectal pronunciation.

3. 2. 2. Lexical Domain

The lexical domain is the structural domain most pervasively affected by purification. High on the purification list are foreignisms, especially Japanese and Sino-Korean words. Japanese words are always automatically recommended for outright eradication. Sino-Korean words are recommended for purification only when they are extremely difficult or readily replaceable by their pure Korean equivalents.

Slang and other indecent words are often placed on the purification list. So are substandard dialectal and archaic words. Although of native Korean origin, these words/phrases of a lowly nature are evidently perceived by purists to be a serious menace to the purity and decency of the Korean language.

3. 2. 3. Syntactic Domain

Many Korean linguists have stressed the necessity of purification of Korean grammar. They often refer to the fact that plural suffixes on nouns, passive markers on verbs, and gender markers on personal pronouns are often used superfluously under the influence of Western languages, such

as English. They contend that such alien superimpositions must be removed because they threaten the purity and even the stability of the grammatical system of the Korean language.

3. 2. 4. Semantic Domain

Some purists in Korea are trying to do the impossible in the name of semantic purification of the Korean language. They urge that words and phrases be purged of all undesirable meanings, where the meanings in question are often associated with cheap slang. These same purists also claim that all tautologous expressions should be struck out of the Korean language if it is to become a truly pure language semantically.

3. 3. Domains of Medium

Human language involves two major mediums, i.e. speech and writing. Although both domains of medium are subject to purification, writing tends to be more frequently affected by purism than speech, at least in Korean.

3. 3. 1. Domain of Speech

In this domain, pronunciation and diction appear to be the two major concerns of language purists in Korea. They devote much of their attention to eliminating dialectal and other inauthentic elements from the pronunciation and diction of standard Korean.

3. 3. 2. Domain of Writing

Within the domain of writing, the biggest purist issue in Korea today is whether to adopt Hangul as the only medium of writing or to use it in tandem with a few thousand Chinese characters. The former option, i.e. the general purist position, is favored by most Koreans under 45 years of age or thereabouts while the latter option has the support of some older Koreans, who are distinctly in the minority.

Another major issue relating to the domain of writing centers around Koreanization, i.e. transliteration into Korean, of foreign words. One group, purist in orientation, contends that Korean renderings of foreign words should comply maximally with the rules of Korean graphophonology. Another group counters that these renderings should be maximally faithful

to the original foreign words, of which they are mere renditions. It appears that the purist group is beginning to gain the upper hand here.

Still another issue that belongs in the domain of writing has to do with Romanization, i.e. transliteration of Korean words into the Roman alphabet. Here a purist-leaning camp is fighting for a Korean-initiated system of Romanization. Another camp favors one of the two convenient American-initiated systems already in existence, i.e. either the McCune-Reischauer System or the Yale System. There is no predicting at this point which camp will eventually emerge victorious.

3.4. Domains of Skill

Language involves the receptive skills of listening and reading, on the one hand, and the productive skills of speaking and writing, on the other. Purification apparently applies to the productive aspects of language use only. In this respect, it is very much like error analysis, as practiced in applied linguistics. In fact, purification involves error analysis of sorts as its major component.

3.5. Domains of Formality

The binary distinction between formal and informal language is relevant to our discussion here in that purists often frown upon the contamination of formal language by informal language, but not usually vice versa. Incidentally, this may mean that purification is directional with respect to formality.

Purification also appears to be directional with respect to politeness and decency. It is thought that polite and decent language can be contaminated by impolite and indecent language, but not vice versa. This directionality may stem from the general assumption that formal, polite, and decent language is somehow purer and more authentic than informal, impolite, and indecent language.

4. Rhetoric of Purification

Korean language purists resort to a number of rationales in justifying their activities. Here we will attempt to present a fairly exhaustive list of these rationales.

4.1. Decontamination

Decontamination is the rationale most frequently cited for language purification in Korea. Purists often call for a complete eradication of foreign/loan elements from the Korean language, contending that such elements pose a serious threat to the purity not just of the language but also of the Korean psyche.

4.2. National Identification

National identification is another rationale very frequently cited for language purification in Korea. The argument here is that, as the most distinctive symbol of Korea as a sovereign nation, Korean must be maximally clear of foreign elements.

4.3. National Harmony

The rationale of national harmony is often resorted to in justification of language purification in Korea. Purists often contend that conspicuous dialectal forms are destructive of national harmony and hence need to be expunged from formal contexts where standard Korean is required.

Many people are beginning to worry about the bifurcation of vocabulary between North and South Korea that is becoming more and more noticeable. Claiming that this bifurcation may stand in the way of national harmony if and when Korea is reunified, they urge that a large-scale study be undertaken now to work out a solution to this potential problem. However this problem may be resolved, it will involve some measure of purification.

4.4. Economy

Language purists in Korea often use the argument of economy in defence of their call for purification. They claim, for example, that the use of a foreign/loan word, which has a Korean equivalent, is uneconomical and therefore totally unwarranted. They often use this argument in calling for the eradication of foreign/loan words.

Purists also resort to this economy rhetoric in defence of their demand for the adoption of Hangeul as the sole official medium of writing in Korea. They argue that Hangeul is far more economical than Chinese characters.

Hangul can be mastered in a matter of hours or, at most, days, while learning to use enough Chinese characters normally takes years of hard work.

4. 5. Comprehensibility

Purists often argue that opaque Sino-Korean words, for example, should be replaced by their more transparent equivalents, preferably those of pure Korean origin. They claim that expressions of low comprehensibility hinder communication and should thus be purified.

4. 6. Refinement

Purists sometimes argue that obscenities, profanities, vulgarisms, and other indecent elements must be obliterated from the Korean language if it is to attain to a state of decency worthy of a respectable national language.

4. 7. Democratization

The rhetoric of democratization sometimes figures prominently as a rationale for purification. The Government has recently been trying to democratize its documents by ridding them of expressions that are not egalitarian in tone or not readily comprehensible to the average citizen.

4. 8. Universal Literacy

Language purists in Korea sometimes resort to the need for universal literacy in justifying their cause. They use this rhetoric especially in connection with their claim that Hangul should become the only legitimate medium of writing in Korea. The contention here is that, as a democracy, Korea needs universal literacy, which is attainable only with an easy medium of writing such as Hangul.

4. 9. Automation

Purists often call for the exclusive use of Hangul by citing automation as a factor that favors Hangul over Chinese characters. They argue that Hangul, with a mere 24 simple letters, is easily amenable to automation while thousands of complicated Chinese characters are not.

5. Strategies and Outcomes

Korean language purists have used many different strategies to achieve their goals. In this section, we will discuss some of these strategies and the outcomes that they and other factors have helped to produce.

5.1. Strategies

The language purification strategies used in Korea are varied, ranging from purification lists to governmental decrees concerning radio and television programs.

5.1.1. Purification Lists

Lists of items to be purified are often used to direct purification along certain prescribed lines. The Ministry of Education, for one, has published fairly extensive lists of such items over the last ten years or so. Items on such lists are usually recommended for purification along one of the following three lines.

- (1) $X \rightarrow O$ (2) $X \rightarrow Y/X$ (3) $X \rightarrow Y$

The first formula states that X is to be zeroed out, i.e. the item in question must not be used. The second formula is to be interpreted as saying that X is preferably replaced by Y , i.e. the item in question is preferably replaced by its alternative suggested on the right-hand side of the arrow. The third formula means that X must be replaced by Y , i.e. the item in question must be replaced by its alternative suggested on the right-hand side of the arrow.

Purification lists can be published in book form, as is the case with the Ministry of Education lists. They can also comprise just a few items, posted daily on bulletin boards or carried occasionally in newsletters, as in the case of the Korean Broadcasting System. Book-length lists tend to be used for macro-purification and shorter lists for micro-purification.

5.1.2. Purification Handbooks

Handbooks are sometimes used to provide guidelines for the purification movement. Some of these books are essentially handy dictionaries of usage

(cf. Park). Others are collections of papers on purist themes (cf. Huh). Still others are practical guides to the theory and practice of purification, as is the case with Nahm and the Society for Korean Language Education.

5. 1. 3. Governmental Decrees

Governmental decrees are sometimes used as strategies for language purification. The late President Park Chung-Hee, for example, ordered in the late 1960s that the Government take measures for the gradual adoption of Hangul as the exclusive medium of writing in Korea. He also ordered then that the Korean statutes be stripped of such Chinese characters and Sino-Korean words as are not readily comprehensible to the average citizen. On several occasions in the middle to late 1970s, the Ministry of Home-Affairs instructed the national police to have all signboards and billboards purified of blatant foreignisms.

5. 1. 4. Newspaper and Magazine Articles

Newspapers and magazines sometimes carry articles designed to promote language purification. We have already referred in 2. 3. 1. to the Hankuk Ilbo Daily, which carried a long series of such articles in 1984.

5. 1. 5. Radio and Television Programs

Broadcast programs, both radio and television, are often employed to carry the message of language purification to the people. We have already referred in 2. 3. 2. to the broadcast purification programs currently on the air.

5. 1. 6. Slogans

Slogans are often used by language purists in reaching out to the people. Perhaps the best known of these slogans is "Love your country, love your language," which can be seen on school gates and walls all over Korea. Most slogans call on the nation to cleanse the Korean language of all impurities.

5. 1. 7. Declarations of Principles

Declarations of principles are sometimes used to set guidelines for puri-

fication in certain areas. For example, the Korean Language Society declared its celebrated principles of *Unified Korean Orthography* (1933) and of *Standard Korean* (1936). These two sets of principles serve to this day as the basis for the standardization and purification of Korean. Principles for both Koreanization and Romanization have also been declared by both the Government and learned societies on a number of occasions.

5.1.8. Workshops

Sometimes workshops serve as instruments of language purification in Korea. We have already referred in 2.3.3. to the language purification workshops of the Korean Broadcasting System. The Phonetic Society of Korea and other organizations also sponsor similar purification workshops on an occasional basis.

5.1.9. Name Campaigns

Name "pageants" are held annually at some Korean universities with a view to popularizing pure Korean first names. These pageants of pure Korean names are usually sponsored by activist student groups calling themselves "the Students for the Korean Language."

Some purist groups in Korea are committed to the revival of pure Korean place names. Their goal is to restore original Korean place names and persuade the authorities to substitute them for the Sino-Korean place-names that have ousted them at different points in Korean history.

5.2. Outcomes

We will now turn our attention to the outcomes of Korea's language purism. Those outcomes which are due to the strategies of the sort discussed in 5.1. may be referred to as strategy-dependent. Strategy-dependent outcomes are usually straightforward in that they follow the lines prescribed by the strategies in question. Thus we will not have anything more to say about them here.

Instead we will concern ourselves with those outcomes which are not directly dependent on the strategies of 5.1. These strategy-independent outcomes differ from the strategy-dependent ones in that they are not quite as premeditated and thus not quite as purposive.

5.2.1. Producer-Dependent Outcome

The producer of language, i.e. the speaker-writer-editor, is among the crucial variables that determine the outcome of language purification. The producer variable comprises, among other things, the age, sex, and education of the producer.

It is interesting that writings by Koreans in their mid-forties or younger tend to be far freer of Chinese characters and Sino-Korean words than those by older Koreans. The forces of purism have apparently touched the former age group far more forcefully than they have the latter. This evidently has to do at least in part with the fact that the voice of purism has been especially loud and clear in the post-1945 Korean school system.

Other things being equal, female Koreans tend to purify their language more than male Koreans do. Thus female Koreans tend to use fewer Chinese characters, foreignisms, and dialectalisms than male Koreans do. Female Koreans also tend to use more decent and refined language than male Koreans do. This may indicate that females are generally more puristically inclined than males are, at least in Korea.

The education of the producer also appears to affect the outcome of language purification. The language of less well-educated Koreans tends to contain fewer Chinese characters and fewer foreignisms than that of their better-educated brethren. On the other hand, well-educated Koreans generally use fewer dialectalisms than less well-educated Koreans do.

5.2.2. Consumer-Dependent Outcome

The consumer of language, i.e. its hearer-reader, often plays a crucial role in determining the outcome of purification. In determining the extent and direction of language purification, the producer normally takes account of the consumer's age, sex, education, and so on.

For example, the producer tends to use Chinese characters and Sino-Korean words more sparingly with a young consumer than with an old one, with a female consumer than with a male one, and with a less learned consumer than with a more learned one. This helps explain why women's magazines use more purified language than men's and why children's newspapers use more purified language than adult newspapers.

This consumer-dependent outcome is perhaps best exemplified by the language of signboards and billboards. As noted in 3.1.9., this area of language has become almost completely free of Chinese characters because they had become virtually *all Chinese* (and thus inconvenient) to many Koreans.

Sometimes the consumer variable may conflict with the producer variable. When there is such a conflict, the consumer variable often takes precedence. Thus although generally well versed in Chinese characters, literary writers and magazine editors usually opt for the near exclusive use of Hangul. This is evidently another interesting example of consumer-sensitive purification.

It is interesting to note here that newspaper editors have been generally resistant to the wave of language purism in Korea. Thus many of them have made the point of using numerous Chinese characters in their newspapers. This may be cited as a case of the producer variable taking precedence over the consumer variable. However, times are changing, with even the most anti-purist newspaper editors beginning to use fewer Chinese characters. This movement away from Chinese characters may be inevitable considering that their newspapers would not be as well received by their average readership should they continue to use many Chinese characters. Thus even here the producer appears to be losing the battle to the consumer.

5.2.3. Authority-Dependent Outcome

The outcome of language purification can often be affected by language authorities such as broadcasts, literary masterpieces, grammars, dictionaries, newspapers, and magazines. This is because, rightly or wrongly, people regard them as the ultimate paragons and arbiters of authentic usage and style.

5.2.4. Domain-Dependent Outcome

The outcome of language purification is often domain- or topic-dependent. A less serious domain tends to be freer from Chinese characters and Sino-Korean expressions than a more serious domain. Thus informal Korean is generally freer from Chinese characters and Sino-Korean expressions than formal Korean.

A less serious topic tends to use fewer Chinese characters than a more

serious one. Thus the sports page in a newspaper tends to avoid Chinese characters to a greater extent than, say, the cultural page in the same newspaper. A book about cooking is likely to employ far fewer Chinese characters than one on history.

Speaking of the structural domains, the essentially contentive domain of lexicon is targeted for purification far more than the formal domain of either grammar or phonology. This may mean that content tends to be more amenable to alien contamination and hence more subject to purification than form is.

Within the lexical domain, different parts of speech may be differentially subject to purification. For example, the noun, especially the proper noun, is apparently more likely to be written in Chinese characters and thus is more frequently targeted for purification than other parts of speech. This may have to do at least in part with the fact that the noun, especially the proper noun, is far more contentive than other parts of speech.

Purification applies to the productive domains of speaking and writing, not usually to the receptive domains of listening and reading. One may, however, speak of receptive purification in the sense of the consumer affecting the language of the producer, that is, in the sense of 5.2.2.

5.2.5. Ideology-Dependent Outcome

Ideology also plays a role in determining the outcome of language purification. Thus such words as are associated with the communist ideology of North Korea are generally banned or avoided in South Korea. *toŋmu* 'friend/comrade' and *inmin* 'people/masses' are cases in point. These words, which were perfectly respectable in all of Korea prior to national division in 1945, are now replaced in South Korea by their respective synonyms *činku* and *kukmin*.

6. Reverse Purification

Reverse purification is purification in the opposite direction, i.e. purification of non-native language materials contaminated by native language sources. Thus reverse purification in the Korean context presupposes that Korean sources can and do contaminate foreign-language materials to a serious extent.

Reverse purification is often an issue of direct concern to international communication and foreign-language education. We will show what is at issue here by taking a few examples of how Korean sources contaminate English much to the detriment of its instrumentality in international communication.

To begin with, contamination of English often stems from Korean-language habits. A case in point is the ungrammatical *in the below box*, which appears in a high-school English textbook. This weird phrase is apparently a verbatim translation for the Korean equivalent of the grammatical *in the box below*. Another example is the un-English *South-North dialogue*, an expression often used in Korea's English-language publications for international readers. There may be a political motivation behind the reversal of order from the idiomatic *North-South* to the unidiomatic *South-North* here. However, the order in the unidiomatic *South-North* also seems to be patterned quite transparently on that in the Korean equivalent of the idiomatic *North-South*.

The source of contamination is sometimes English-Korean dictionaries. Take for example *in memory of*, often misused for *in honor of*, as in "This dinner is *in memory of* all of us." This particular instance of contamination appears to result from the failure of most English-Korean dictionaries to clearly distinguish between the two phrases in question. More specifically, the misuse here apparently stems from the failure of these dictionaries to make the point that *in memory of*, unlike *in honor of*, is referentially restricted to the deceased only.

Contamination may also arise from the divergence in meaning between a loan word and its purported source. Take for example the loan word *apat*, whose purported source is the English *apartment*. Because of this purported connection between the words, Koreans tend to think that they mean one and the same thing. However, the fact of the matter is that *apat* actually refers to a condominium, not to an apartment. Thus Koreans often make the mistake of using *apartment* in reference to a condominium.

All these examples of contamination are due ultimately to the inadequate command of English on the part of Korean users of English. The following examples are more directly reflective of this inadequate command of English. One high-school English textbook uses the wrong expression *the*

National Revival Army in reference to the *National Liberation Army*, which fought for Korean independence from Japan. Another high-school textbook suggests that “*Among other things*, I am interested in history” means “I am interested in history *more than in anything else*.” It is clearly wrong, however, since the real meaning of the sentence is “I am interested in *a number of things*, one of which is history.” Still another high-school textbook says “*Kyongbokkung is the house of the National Museum*,” which is definitely odd and should be revised to something like “*Kyongbokkung houses the National Museum*.”

Still another type of contamination has to do with speech-level mix-ups. Most Koreans, including textbook authors, mistakenly assume that English does not distinguish between speech levels so that they seldom pay any attention to speech-level differences in English. Thus they often use overly familiar speech where very polite speech is appropriate and vice versa. Such a mix-up of speech levels often creates such an undesirable impression that the channel of communication may become unnecessarily tense.

All these examples of contamination can disrupt communication between Korean and non-Korean users of English in one way or another. Examples that involve distortion of meaning are potentially more disruptive of this communication than are those that do not. Of the examples discussed above, for example, *the National Revival Army* may be more of a barrier to communication than *in the below box*.

It is quite clear that contamination-ridden English is less than an optimal tool for international communication. Thus we need to rid English of contamination of all the types mentioned above if we are to make it a more efficient medium of communication between Korean and non-Korean users of English. This is where reverse purification comes in for English in the Korean context.

By way of closing this chapter, we may note that reverse purification of English in the Korean context should involve a dramatic upgrading of the quality of English-language teaching in the country. This is because the contamination, of whatever kind it may be, comes ultimately from an inadequate knowledge of English on the part of its Korean users. Among other things, efforts should be made to produce contamination-free English through better textbooks and teachers.

7. Critique

In this final section, we will attempt a short critique of language purism in Korea, especially its fundamentalist version. To begin with, we may point out that Korean language purists are often excessively nationalistic or even chauvinistic. They tend to assume that theirs is the only language in the world that is truly pure and beautiful.

These purists thus often contend that foreign elements in Korean so contaminate the Korean psyche that they must be eradicated. They may have a point here, but they seem to carry their argument a little too far. For each and every language is pure and beautiful in its own way.

Korean language purists are also often too simplistic. For example, they claim that the use of a loan word, of which Korean has an equivalent, is uneconomical and hence must not be allowed. However, they should also remember that the presence of a loan equivalent alongside a pure Korean word can add significantly to the expressive power of the Korean language.

Many Korean language purists appear to be too unrealistic. For one thing, they often propose using overly contrived pure Korean coinages for perfectly natural, well established Sino-Korean words. They also seem to be oblivious to the fact that normal exchanges between nations are bound to involve linguistic exchanges also so that loan words are in fact inevitable in the modern world. Furthermore, they naively believe that they can turn back the tides of language by, say, expurgating Korean of all indecent elements such as coarse slang.

Fundamentalist Korean language purists are often too radical. Claiming that theirs is the only true version of purism, they insist upon immediate, across-the-board purification strictly on their fundamentalist terms. They flatly refuse to settle by compromise their differences with other purists.

If they are to be more acceptable to a larger segment of the Korean population and thus more effective, fundamentalist Korean language purists should take a more moderate, sensible stance. They could do so by stripping their purism of such (ultra)nationalism, simplism, unrealism, and radicalism as we have noted here.

We may note in this connection that, of the rationales discussed in 4, decontamination and national identification are almost always resorted to

by the most radical fundamentalists. We may further note that these two rationales, especially the former, may not always be entirely rational and thus may not make as much sense as the other rationales.

Korean language purists also apparently attach far more importance to strategy-dependent than to strategy-independent purification. However, they should not forget that strategy-independent purification can often be far less painful and far more effective than strategy-dependent purification. It may very well be the case that laissez-faire purification is preferable to enforced purification.

Annotated Bibliography

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This is a collection of papers on themes relating to Korean language purification and education. Among the purist themes dealt with here are: (1) Problems for Korean Language Purification, (2) Language Purification with Reference to the National Psyche, and (3) Methodology of Language Purification.

ABSTRACT

Language Purism in Korea today

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This paper discusses various aspects of language purism as it is practiced in the Republic of Korea today. Among other things, it deals with the socio-political context of language purism in contemporary Korea, its major practitioners, its targets, its rhetoric, and its strategies.

The paper also addresses the question of reverse purification, i.e. purification of foreign-language materials contaminated by Korean-language sources. It is suggested that this reverse purification can contribute to better international communication. It is also suggested that reverse purification can best be achieved through dramatic improvements in the quality of Korea's foreign-language education.

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