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Book review

The Handbook of East Asian Psycholinguistics
Volume 3, Korean

Chungmin Lee, Greg B. Simpson, and Youngjin Kim(Eds.)
Cambridge University Press, 2015, 660 Pages

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Korean is a language spoken not only in South and North Korea but also by many members of the Korean diaspora all over the world, and it has the 11th largest group of speakers so far, according to the book. In addition, in East Asia, the position of the Korean language seems to be characteristic in that it has a Korean alphabet of its own, called ‘Hangul,’ and the grammar is far different from the Chinese one. Also, we cannot ignore the interesting fact that it shares a large amount of vocabulary and many word concepts derived from Chinese characters (called ‘Hanja’ in Korea) with Japanese and Chinese. Furthermore, people around the world may be interested in the Korean language thanks to Korean popular culture, such as K-pop, which has been spreading around the world. Hence, the characteristics of Korean and the society in which it is spoken should be worth pursuing for various types of researchers, including sociologists, linguists, cultural anthropologists, and so on. Knowing the Korean language and culture well may also enable us to understand what China, Japan, and Korea do and do not share in the Sinosphere.

This book gives us enough opportunities to argue about such topics by showing comprehensive insights into psycholinguistics, focusing on Korean. Taking the title of this book into consideration, it may sound specialized, but beyond the boundaries of psycholinguistics, it provides us with clues to understanding Korean-speaking society appropriately. The purpose of this review is not only to summarize the details of the book but also to emphasize and focus on insights we can apply from psycholinguistics to other academic disciplines of Korean studies, including sociology, cultural anthropology, media studies, or diaspora studies.

The book consists of 44 chapters, which are largely divided into two sections. Chapters 1 to 27 explain the way people acquire the Korean language in terms of psycholinguistics. On the other hand, the authors discuss how people recognize the

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written or spoken Korean language in Chapters 28 to 44.

Chapter 1 discusses how Korean children use or drop markers indicating the topic and the subject when acquiring Korean noun phrases. In Chapter 2, the author concisely reviews recent research and issues in the acquisition of Korean argument structure and transitivity. Chapter 3 shows us the process by which Korean children acquire the case-marking system of the language and makes it clear that the children tend to rely on word order prior to case particles based on their experiences (p.4). The following three chapters, from 4 to 6, as well as chapter 7, focus on the process by which children acquire verbs. In chapters 8 to 17, what is called 'morpho-syntactic' constructions expressing negation, numeral classifiers, anaphora, and so on are introduced, and the way Korean children acquire them is discussed. Next, chapter 18 discusses the prosody acquisition of Korean-speaking children. The following seven chapters, from 19 to 25, examine studies on second-language acquisition related to Korean. In particular, the word 'Heritage language' in chapter 19 is emphasized, and it implies that the Korean language tends to be gradually forgotten and become the so-called 'Heritage language' easily by the Korean diaspora. This chapter also makes us realize that many Korean diaspora are trying to 'relearn' Korean, but they sometimes have difficulties retrieving Korean once they forget it. Chapter 26 is about the role of the ontological concept versus shape in word learning, and Chapter 27 is about observations on Korean Sign Language (KSL) (p.11).

Part 2 of this book begins in chapter 28. The main purpose of part 2 is to clarify how people recognize, understand, and use spoken or written Korean. Although sometimes the explanations become complicated and extremely specialized here, they make it possible to catch the character of Korean well. The authors explain the characteristics of the Korean writing system, composed of the 'Hangul' alphabet, in four chapters from 28 to 31. Some authors say the Hangul alphabet, printed in syllable blocks, has a very regular and consistent relationship between a word's spelling and its pronunciation, but other authors pay careful attention to Sino-Korean words derived from Chinese characters. Though the Korean language is written almost only by the Hangul alphabet, except in newspapers, academic papers, and the product labeling these days, it is also true that a number of Korean words come from Chinese characters, called 'Hanja' in Korea. In chapter 30, the author explains that Korean-speaking people recognize strong inhibitory links made by 'Hanja' when they interpret the meanings of words at a morphological level. Besides, in chapter 31, it turns out that 'Hanja' can be processed with reference to Hangul if the proficiency in reading 'Hanja' is sufficient. This phenomenon is explained as 'script-switching' (p.415) and seems to help us understand the role of Chinese characters in Korea, which is called 'Hanja.' The following Chapter 32 shows the additional study on the recognition of Hangul or 'Hanja' words and concludes that Korean readers rely on the phonological information of Hangul, which is often related to 'Hanja'

providing origins of words. Chapter 33 introduces a discussion on the intonation contour of phrases and sentences, and the following five chapters, from 34 to 38, discuss characteristics of the Korean sentence and discourse situations. The final six chapters, from 39 to 44, give a supplementary explanation of applied aspects of Korean psycholinguistics, such as disorders, individual differences, and computational implementation (p.17).

As is said at the head of this review, this book is filled with suggestions to analyze Korean society, language, and culture beyond the fundamental approach of psycholinguistics in that the authors introduce persuasive insights from their informants. It goes without saying that such insights should be applied to other disciplines, including sociology, cultural anthropology, and so on.

For instance, firstly, regarding Korean as a so-called 'Heritage language' helps us investigate not only the reasons why the diaspora (whether they desire to or not) try to maintain, lose, or relearn their Heritage language but also the mutual relationship between their identity and Heritage languages. Much more effort should be made to clarify the motives that will make the Korean diaspora relearn and retrieve Korean in the near future.

Secondly, highlighting the process by which Korean people recognize words made of 'Hanja' may identify the changing roles of Chinese characters and the attitude of people towards 'Hanja' in today's Korean society. Despite the fact that Korean culture and language are developed and cultivated not only by the Hangul alphabet but also 'Hanja', the role seems to be changing in that the opportunities for Korean people to learn, read, or write 'Hanja' are decreasing throughout Korea for the time being. Insights based on psycholinguistics stimulate researchers' interest in such an upheaval by showing us the reality of today's Korean society, where people use the vocabulary based on 'Hanja' without realizing that they speak, read, and hear languages derived from 'Hanja' every day.

Since knowing how people acquire, recognize, and use languages means knowing the way they live, it is strongly expected that those researching Korean society and culture of various academic disciplines will discover meaningful views from the book. It is necessary to continue observing Korean society, where the way people recognize and sometimes 'consume' the language is changing dramatically. This book can be a starting point for future Korean studies ranging from media to diaspora studies.

Note

The first edition is Lee, C., Simpson, G., & Kim, Y. (Eds.). (2009). *Handbook of East Asian psycholinguistics: Volume 3, Korean* (1st ed.). Cambridge University Press.

