

# LING 290

## LECTURE NOTES 17

### **Korean Writing**

(Ch. 7: From Word to Syllable II:  
Korean Writing pp. 115-122)

### **Today's Topics**

- i. Linguistic Background
- ii. *Ido*
- iii. *Han'gul* script
- iv. Practicing *Han'gul*

## **i. Linguistic Background**

### **Unsuitability:**

Korean belongs to the (agglutinative) **Altaic language** family.

Certain **grammatical features of Korean** makes the Chinese writing system extremely ill suited to it:

- 1) Grammatical information is expressed by **postpositions** and **particles**.
- 2) Words re usually **polysyllabic**.

## Adaptation strategies:

The Korean used two adaptation strategies for writing their language with Chinese characters:

- 1) A character was used to **represent a syllable** irrespective of its meaning in Chinese: e.g.

Chinese 古 (ko) 'old' for the Korean syllable /ku/.

- 2) A character is used to **represent a Korean word** which corresponds to the Chinese word: e.g.

水 /shuj/ 'water'     /mul/ 'water'

## ii. *Ido*

### **Chinese:**

Lack of inflectional morphemes.

### **Korean:**

Being rich in grammatical markers.

### **Development of *Ido*:**

In the seventh century, the Korean developed **its own writing** format.

A mixture of lexical words written in *Hanja* and grammatical markers represented by a special set of Chinese characters.

In the **thirteenth and fourteenth centuries**, some of the grammatical morpheme characters were simplified and thus became **graphically distinct** from Chinese characters representing lexical words.

These characters were called *Kugyol*.

### iii. *Han'gul* script

King Sejong is credited with the creation of *Han'gul*, the **most remarkable writing system** ever invented.

**Systematic mapping** between elements of the **phonological system** and **graphical signs**.

The system consists of 28 signs; **24 of them are used** today.

Due to the depth of its phonological analysis, *Han'gul* has been called '**the most rational of all writing systems**'.

## **Systematicity:**

Some phonemes are considered more basic than others and therefore signs are created for the latter by adding diacritics to the ones used for the former.

These diacritics were applied in a highly systematic way: e. g.

- 1) All **aspirated consonants** are represented by **adding a bar** to the sign of the respective non-aspirated consonants.
- 2) **Palatalization** is indicated by **an additional stroke**.
- 3) **Diphthongs** are represented by **adding the same element** in all cases to basic vowel signs.

## Alpha-Syllabic:

The Korean recognized the **syllable** as **an important unit** of speech.

Instead of writing the **basic signs** in linear succession, they **are stacked together** to form units that can be perceived as representing syllables.

Although the composite parts of the syllabic frames are easily distinguishable, the **syllable** is given greatest prominence **as a written unit**.

In every frame consonant and vowel elements are united to form a syllable.

For the sake of uniformity the consonant sign for /y/ is used in conjunction with vowel signs to represent syllables without consonants.

## **Post-*Han'gul* Texts:**

Even after the invention of *Han'gul*, the Korean **continued to use Chinese**.

In *Han'gul* texts Chinese loan words are written with Chinese characters to be read in Sino-Korean.

Since Chinese loan words form a substantial part of the Korean vocabulary, Korean **texts are interspersed with Chinese characters**.

## **iv. Practicing *Han'gul* characters**

Assisted  
by  
Ms. Young Hee Kim

See the Course Pack, pp. 76-77