

Languageism, Linguistic Diversity and Language Policy* **

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Lee, Chongmin. (2016). Languageism, Linguistic Diversity and Language Policy. *The Linguistic Association of Korea Journal*, 24(2), 197-208. It can be said that every nation may have its unique language usage and diverse policy. Even in Korean, it can be noticed that the attitudes and policies of the Korean government distinguish proper Korean words from the imported foreign words. This is a very interesting topic in that the Korean people are very strict about native words, but really generous or careless about borrowed foreign words. This paper aims to illuminate how this type of distinction can be categorized as a phenomenon which is named as languageism. This type of linguistic discrimination can be illustrated with lots of examples. Furthermore, it will be discussed in relation to the people's attitudes towards the social trend of communication culture.

Key Words: language policy, languageism, use diversity

I. The Emergence of Languageism

As the speed of globalization has been accelerated these days, the contacts with the foreign loanwords have been increased drastically. The social, political, economic and cultural pressures are collected on the improvement of English skills as the necessary prerequisite for the upcoming future. Even some writers

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have asserted that the English language should be an official language in the public services. Winfred (2003, p. 11) suggested that mixed contact may involve the issues of language maintenance, shift or creation. Very fortunately there have been no big worries in the Korean language about these issues which the import of foreign languages may bring about. Furthermore, it could become more problematic if we consider speech as a chaotic system (Kretzschmar 2009, p. 211).

The Korean translation or transcription has been prevalent in the books and newspapers with a very rare exception. In some professional fields like medical, dental or veterinary sciences the technical terminologies have been adopted without being translated or transcribed into Korean. The translation or transcription of original foreign terminologies have been used in a confused manner.

It has been frequently and effortlessly observed that foreign words have been discriminated from proper Korean words. When new words were borrowed from abroad, they have been treated as exceptional or non-attended. This phenomenon can be generalized as languageism. The term 'languageism' has been devised to refer to the cases where imported words have been neglected or ignored irrespective of where they are imported from. As racism occurs in accordance to races, languageism prevails depending on the languages. It is interesting to notice that languageism can be paralleled with racism because different races use different languages. Recently the problem of a multi-cultural society also arises, because the Asian immigrants increase in the Korean community. Languageism is a prejudiced discrimination of language. In the 1980's, linguicism has been coined with the following definition: "ideologies and structures which are used to legitimate, effectuate, and reproduce unequal division of power and resources (both material and non-material) between groups which are defined on the basis of language (requoted from Wikipedia, and originally annotated from Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson 1989). Languageism distinguishes the languages depending on whether they are native or foreign. Linguicism discriminates the people depending on what languages they are using. Languageism and linguicism are both subconscious and generally less noticeable (Cf. Barrett 2006).

It can be believed that the situation in which languageism spreads resulted

from the social attitudes and governmental policies. The general attitudes towards newly imported foreign words are too meager to keep any standards. It is said that no kind of transcription can pose any problems in understanding the communicational content. The basic question like "Is it communicated?" is simply answered by the phrase "Then that is enough." In other words, if it is communicated successfully and exactly, then it does not cause any problems. For example, the 8 Korean transcriptions of the English word 'masters' can be understood comfortably among Korean speakers, in spite of the different Korean spellings¹⁾. It has been pointed out that the language differences should have caused some reading difficulties or communication problems. As Labov (1993, p. 154) mentioned, it is a political issue rather than a linguistic problem.

However, if a Korean word is expressed in 8 different ways, I believe that such a situation cannot be tolerated, probably by the people and the government. Can you imagine such occasions? It is not supposed that the Korean word 'mujige' (meaning 'rainbow') has 8 different spellings; for example, 'majige, majugae, mijigae, mochigae, moucige, mejige, mejugae, etc.' This situation may not be tolerated. In the case of 'jajangmyeon', the government tries to regulate one unique form, so some writers got stuck to the folk form like 'jjajangmyeon'. It was a big resistance to the new regulation.²⁾

This kind of linguistic discrimination can be shown as a typical example of languageism. The attitudes and policies distinguish proper Korean words from the imported foreign words. This is a very interesting topic in that the Korean people are very strict about native words, but really generous or careless about borrowed foreign words. In an extension of languageism, these people can be categorized as languageists.

1) There are 8 variations in transcribing the word 'masters' in Korean; for example, 'maseutaseu,' 'maseutazeu,' 'maseuteoseu,' 'maseuteozeu,' 'maeseutaseu,' 'maeseutazeu,' 'maeseuteoseu' and 'maeseuteo.'

2) Ahn Dohyun, a famous Korean poet, explicitly denied to take *jajangmyeon* as a standard form. However, lots of people observed the new direction. In 2011 the National Institute of Korean announced that *jjajangmyeon* is accepted as a standard form as with *jajangmyeon*. It is very interesting that it took 25 years to restore the refused *jjajangmyeon* and they did not give up *jajangmyeon*, which was intentionally designated by the Institute.

II. Why do we have languageism?

Languageism is easily noticeable in Korean if we are interested in how it has been realized. We can think of at least three main causes for languageism. More than anything else, the primary cause comes from the Korean language itself. The deficiency of consonants and vowels is revealed when it comes to English or foreign words. It can be said that the intrinsic structural properties apply to the limits of the transcription system. In addition, some cultural reasons can be added in case of coffee. The word 'coffee' is expressed as 'keopi', not as 'kopi', because the latter is associated with 'nose blood'. This shows that the language contact is affected socioculturally (Cf. Wierzbicka 1986).

Secondly, as it was pointed out in the above section, in the example of 'Beatles' we have two expressions like 'biteulseu' and 'biteuljeu'. We have not established some strict rules or regulations. Although we have rules and systems, everybody has their own voices without any penalties. This kind of arbitrariness has been derived from the discrepancy between spelling and pronunciation. It is a great dilemma at the crossroads of spelling and pronunciation. We are confused with the question whether we follow our eyes or ears. The English letter 's' is usually pronounced either way like [s] or [z], depending on the phonetic context. If the government is not a kind of languageist, the norm should be established as one unique form. The attitudes of languageism supporters have brought a lot of complexities and confusions in the everyday lives of Korean people. At first, the eyes have played the primary role more than the ears. Even today, foreign companies choose the transcriptions based on spelling; for example, beatles as 'biteulseu (비틀스)'. We may look at a funny example like 'Miss ('an unmarried lady')' and 'mis (the prefix in 'mistake')'. The English words like Miss and 'mis- (in *mistake*)' have the same pronunciation, but a newly coined Konglish word 'Miss mis' is represented as 'missequ miseu (미쓰 미스)' (which means 'an unsuccessful lady' compared with 'gold Miss' with the sound 'goldeu miseu (골드 미스)'). The same word Miss has two forms like 'missequ (미쓰)' and 'miseu (미스)'. As a result, we hesitate for a moment when we search for a key term and it doubles the surfing efforts during Internet browsing. We are paying the cost without noticing it.

In its extended logic, the policy of transcribing English words into Korean

has drifted even until today. Maybe it has not been recognized that uniform and convenient standards for transcription could play a crucial role in people's everyday life. Though we have a transcription system for foreign words, there has never been a regulatory system functioning as a coherent device. This situation is also correlated with the Romanization system, which has been revised incoherently by the government.

We do not realize that we are languageism supporters implicitly. Why? The answer is so simple. Suppose that our children call 'gyosu (교수)' as 'gosu (고수)' or 'gyosi (교사)'. If it happens, we will get upset or correct the wrong usage. On the other hand, when we hear 'biteulseu (비틀스)' or 'biteulzeu (비틀즈)', it is acceptable when communicated.

To sum up, we are strict in using Korean words, but we are very generous about foreign words. Since grammar translation methods have been attacked around the 1980's, the issue of communication has been emphasized strongly. Very interestingly, many Korean linguists do not know that they misuse the exact meaning of communication. As a result, it is misunderstood as a mutual exchange of ideas. It is translated as 'sotong (소통)' (mutual communication), rather than 'jeondal (전달)' (one-way communication).

The linguistic differences, the imperfect policies, and generous attitudes have been incorporated to produce social discrimination of languageism. At present there is no possibility that languageism can be cured and some policies for foreign languages can be innovated.³⁾ (Footnote Recently some professional foreigners are leaving Korea, because they cannot communicate in English in the streets, markets, meetings or offices (Cf. Joongangilbo 2010/10/04, E1 by Im Mijin mijin@joongang.co.kr). This reflects the societal situation such that English is focused almost everywhere in the job interviews, but clearly of no use in everyday life.)

Fasold (1984, p. 247) says that "it [=a national language] is the symbol of people's identity as citizens of that nation" and the decisive factor is the power of communication. In case of Korean, even if a lot of foreign words come in, the issues of identity and communication may not be a problem. English has

3) Footnote Recently some professional foreigners are leaving Korea, because they cannot communicate in English in the streets, markets, meetings or offices (Cf. Joongangilbo 2010/10/04, E1).

been mixed up with Korean in singers, announcers, sports casters, intellectuals, or professors.

At this moment, we may pose a question like 'Who is doing language planning?' I have wondered who has the power. We have the National Korean Institute, which regulates the standardization of Korean usage. The simple example is the case of 'jajangmyeon (자장면)', not 'jjajangmyeon (짜장면)'. Some poets like Ahn Do Hyun do not accept this regulation. This situation reflects that fact that we have the standardized rules, but we do not always obey them even in non-imported words.

III. The Effects of Languageism

Zhang (2005, p. 454) says that "English is unquestionably the most valued foreign language at present; others include Japanese, German, and French". It is really true in Korea. The 2009 curriculum has been revised to adopt English as just English, not as one of the foreign language group. This means that English has established its free and independent status in the school curriculum. It is not noticed by many other scholars, but it can produce a huge size of consciousness change. In other words, English comes to have the same curriculum status as Korean, which is the national language.

It has been suggested in the previous sections that the major critical problem of languageism has resulted in the failure of standardization or the loss of uniform usage. We will look at some detailed aspects of how languageism is reflected in our language life. This will be clear evidence that the standards for foreign transcription have not been very effective.

3.1. Consonants

Let us observe the word 'family' as an example. The English word 'family' is transcribed either as 'hwemilri', 'hwemiri' or as 'paemilri'. One foreign word is expressed in the three different Korean words.⁴⁾

4) It is interestingly observed that 'paemiri' is not used in any situations. Probably it is due to the historical reasons such that 'paemilri' is replacing the older ones like 'hwemilri' or

This divergence can be called civil disobedience in that the Korean people do not follow the governmental policies. The government has drastically changed the Romanization system several times and now the 2000 revised version is in use (Kim 2000). In the mean time, Korean people have been tired of observing the system. If a government or more exactly, the National Korean Institute has postulated a system, it is believed that it has to stick to its own system domestically and internationally.

In contrast with the Korean Romanization System (KRS), the English Transcription System (ETS) has no power to regulate or standardize foreign words. Even in a sports game, 'short' is transcribed in two ways. For example, 'short track' is expressed as 'syoteu teuraeg (쇼트 트랙)' in skating, but 'short game' is used as 'syot geym (숏 게임)' in golf. Resultantly 'short' has two Korean forms like 'syoteu (쇼트)' and 'syot (숏)'.

This kind of confusion naturally flows into communicational attitudes. Anything is acceptable if communicated correctly. This functional view of language also contributes to the maintenance of languageism and delays the uniform representation, because communication is the all-purpose key. Some people might say that it is not important to say 'syoteu (쇼트)' or 'syot (숏)', because the foreign pronunciation is more and more frequently used though this is not acceptable in written language. Furthermore, in speaking contexts it is not a problem at all to understand its exact meanings.

These days it is not rare to observe some intelligent people (or the people who can speak foreign languages relatively better) pronouncing foreign words as they are. For example, in the 9 o'clock news at night we can hear the modified foreign sounds when the announcers say words like 'fan, fairway, fund, fact, etc.' Foreign words and foreign sounds are invading our language life. Sometimes personally it is very funny to see a commentator speak foreign words in a mixed way. One good example can be found in sports games. As far as I can remember, the announcer says 'fairway' just like correct English, but he does not seem to know the exact sounds of 'dogleg'. The English word 'dogleg' is transcribed as 'doglegeu (독레그)' in some cases (or 'dogulegeu (도그레그)' in other cases), so its actual Korean pronunciation is 'dongneg (동넵)'. The English and Korean sounds of 'dogleg' are totally different. Regrettably this

'hwemiri'. It is often noticed that some English fluent speakers use 'family' as it is.

reflects the ignorance of foreign pronunciations.

The last example (like 'doglegeu (독레그)') poses a serious question irrespective of whether it is really acceptable if communicated correctly. Communication may be allowable domestically. However, if anyone speaks that way, it cannot be communicated in a foreign country. We have felt a sense of betrayal when we come to know the exact pronunciation. A big list of words can be illustrated without hesitation. For example, the English word 'summer' should be 'seomeo (서머)' rather than 'seom-meo (섬머)', and 'dinner' should be 'dineo (디너)' rather than 'din-neo (딘너)'. It shows us that there is no strict rule for transcription. This can be paraphrased that the ETS exists, but is not observed.

The sense of betrayal occurs when the Korean speakers realize that 'meogbesseu (맥베쓰)' is the more correct sound of 'Macbeth', instead of 'maegbedeu (맥베드)'. If we know the correct transcription of a foreign word, learning a foreign language would have been much easier. In other words, it will reduce the burden of memorizing the foreign words different ways. The exact representation will contribute to the teaching and learning of English pronunciation.

In summary, the communicative force of language has brought about a serious side effect. Lots of Korean speakers have been contaminated by the present transcription system. Even lots of Koreans say 'hwaiting (화이팅)' or 'paiting (파이팅)' to express 'fighting'. For some reason 'fighting' is a most frequently used word in cheering up. We have no 'f' sound in Korean. So we have two divergent expressions of 'hwaiting' or 'paiting'. We have the rule which regulates that the 'f' sound in English should be expressed as 'p (ㅍ)', but people do not obey the system. Furthermore, the National Korean Institute has no plan to unify the transcription. It is said that everything is acceptable if communicable no matter what we say. So there is no hope of establishing one uniform representation.

3.2. Vowels

Lots of non-native speakers of English tend to admit that they cannot acquire the native fluency of pronunciation. As an English teacher, I have noticed that

many Koreans have difficulty in pronouncing the 'open o' sound. This vowel is a key factor in distinguishing American English and British English. Even in America, it plays an important role in determining language change or variation from West Coast to New England (Labov 2002). The people in the West Coast pronounce it as the 'open a' more often than the New Englanders.

This type of alternation of the 'open o' has been reflected in English loanwords in Korean. A typical example may be found in with 'shop' and 'shopping'. 'Shop' is expressed as 'syab (샵)' and 'shopping', as 'syoping (쇼핑)'. We say 'coffee shop' as 'keopi syab (커피 샵)' and 'home shopping', as 'hom syoping (홈 쇼핑)'. The one and the same sound spelled 'o' has been diverged into two different vowels.

It is easily noticeable to realize that even the one and the same word like 'top' has been expressed either as 'tab (탑)' or 'tob (톱)'. There have been no strict rules to decide when to choose the former or the latter. It is not easy to get the information about which English is the standard pronunciation.

The pronunciation of the 'o' spelled words has been misrepresented in the examples like 'mother, brother, another, etc.'. The case of 'mother' is expressed as 'madeo (마더)', contrary to its more exact sound 'meodeo (머더)'.

In case of a very famous golfer named Jack Nicklaus, we can notice several different transcriptions. The name 'Nicklaus' is transcribed as 'nikeulraus (니클라우스), nikelroseu (니클로스), and nikelouseu (니클러스)'. In the same vein, the word 'launching' has been transformed into the Korean 'lonching (론칭) and leonching (런칭)'. [footnote: Here I use l or r for the initial 'rieul (ㄹ)' sound in Korean without distinction.] The significance of language in the production, maintenance and change is also reflected in the social relations of power.

In both cases of consonants and vowels, as far as the English transcription is concerned, there has been no strict system which regulates the uniform and exact pronunciation. This kind of anti-unification problem has been pointed out as a hot issue internationally in the keyboard system of cellular phones (Joongangilbo 2010/10/15). It is hoped that any area should have the uniform standardized system if it does not cause any serious problems.

IV. Concluding Remarks

It has been pointed out very strongly that there is no appropriate policy for expressing foreign words uniformly in Korean. At present it is time to pose the question of how language planning can be done. To answer the question, we need the same 4-step process of fact-finding, planning, implementation and feedback described in Rubin (1971, pp. 218-20; Fasold 1984, pp. 251-254). It is not too late to implant such a policy and it is also desirable to establish a consistent ETS on a governmental or non-governmental basis. Furthermore, it is significant to notice that the micro structures of everyday usage has some consequences of macro structures of social institutions (Fairclough 1989, p. 12).

It is unclear how this variation of transcription offers anything for understanding the psychological reality in language contact. Chomsky has never been convinced that linguistic variation in the social context does not shed any light on the intuitive views of the underlying principles of linguistic knowledge (Chomsky 1976; Wilson and Henry 1998, p. 2). Wilson and Henry (1998) try to relate variation as ways to intermingle sociolinguistics and core linguistics under the assumption that language is influenced under interactive social contexts of style, class, age or education. They believe that the inductive results may contain a systematic explanation of these variations and a predictive power of the upcoming consequences (p. 4), because standard forms are social constructs in any event. This topic poses a serious question for some future research.

It can be concluded that an ETS should be developed on the basis of standard pronunciations, not the literal spellings.⁵⁾ Such a project should be managed and organized by a private institute or an independent research center with the motive that Korean people can use the ETS with great ease. Fairclough (1989, p. 3) also says that language use has some unequal relations with power groups and claims that 'consciousness is the first step toward emancipation'.

Finally the government should have some kind of regulations for people or institutions that do not observe the ETS correctly. As long as we do not have any regulatory activities, the present chaos will remain unchanged. If we have

5) In actuality, it is not a simple matter as it was pointed out that the morphological constitution cannot be ignored completely. The spelling system is easy to implement and difficult to deny its ostensible efficacies.

such a system, we can communicate more conveniently and it will help to improve English education more effectively.

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