

II. KOREAN LANGUAGE

- ◆ Language is the most important set of symbols.
- ◆ Languages influence people's thought and experience more than we recognize.
- ◆ The most important fact about language is that people's worldview is shaped and reflected by the language they speak.
- ◆ That is, people see and interpret the world through the grammatical forms, labels, and categories provided by their language.
- ◆ What this means is that societies with different languages actually perceive the world differently; that is, they use a different set of labels to describe and interpret the same thing.

- The fact that languages influence people's thought is exemplified by the fact that bilingual speakers seem to think differently when they change languages.
- In one study, students in Hong Kong were asked to complete a values test and they expressed more traditional Chinese values when they answered in Cantonese than when they spoke English.

- In another example, North Americans value straight talk and grow impatient with “beating around the bush.” The idea of “Calling spade a spade” is valued.
- In many Asian cultures, in contrast, maintaining harmony is important, so communicators will avoid speaking clearly or directly if that would threaten the group’s harmony or another person’s face.

- It is also true that the language reflects the core values of the speakers in society.
- 1. Koreans' collectivistic mindset is reflected in the way we tend to use the pronoun "our" (우리, *woori*) instead of "my" in their conversations.
- For instance, Koreans refer to their country as "our country" or *urinara* and refer to their home as our home or *urijip*.
- Other examples: *uriabba* (our father), *urihoesa* (our company), *urihakgyo* (our school), etc.

- 2. Hierarchical Worldview
- Confucianism prescribes ideal human relations based on clear hierarchies between older and younger, man and woman, and superior and subordinate.
- While numerous factors serve to distinguish status, age is probably the most important criterion, even in family relationships.
- This type of age distinction and vertical social system permeates Korean society to the extent that it applies almost equally to the family setting.
- For example, specific terms depict each member of the family by rank and siblings refer to each other with the following terms: *hyeong* (*keunhyeong*, *jageunhyeong*), *obba*, *nuna*, *eonni*, and *dongsaeng* (these terms are also used in other social settings).
- Also popular are terms such as *seonbae* and *hubae*.
- Reverence for titles: This emphasis on hierarchy has led to title-calling rather than calling each other by his/her first name.
- Practically everyone is called by his or her title.

- 3. Sexism in the Korean Language
- Reflecting the male dominant culture of traditional Korea, there are many sexist terms still widely used in Korea:
 - *naewae* to refer to couples (*nae*, literally meaning "inside" refers to wife, while *wae*, literally meaning "outside" refers to husband)
 - *Anae* ("inside person"), *ansaram* ("inside person"), and *jipsaram* ("house person") (All of these terms refer to wives).

- Distinction made between paternal relatives and maternal relatives:
- Married uncles who are older than one's father are designated *keunabeoji* or "big father" and younger uncles *jageunabaoji* or "small father."
- Maternal uncles, on the other hand, are called *oesamchon*, with the prefix *oe* meaning "outside," irrespective of their marital status.
- Similarly, maternal aunts, married or unmarried, are called *eemo* (Paternal aunts are designated *gomo*).
- Other examples include *oesachon*, *oehalabeoji*, *oehalmeoni*, *oesukmo*, and *oegatjip*.
- These terminologies indicate gender discrimination in the sense that maternal uncles and aunts are designated with a prefix that suggests an outsider identity.

- 4. National Food: Rice
- Continuing with the idea that the language reflects the core values of the speakers in society, consider the examples of Eskimo's terms for "snow" and Philippino's terms for "banana."
- Koreans' use of three different terms for "rice": *byeo*, *ssal*, and *bap*.

- Many Korean colloquial words and expressions include the term rice or “bap.”
- For example, a common greeting around breakfast, lunch and dinner times among Koreans is to ask, “*Bap meokeotnya?* (밥 먹었냐?)” which means “Have you eaten rice?”
- They are also prone to say “Let’s go eat rice” around meal times. Other examples:
 - *Bapgap* (밥값, literally the price of rice) is used generically to mean food expenses and costs
 - *Bapgapdo mothanda* (밥값도 못한다, used to describe someone who is considered so inept that he/she is unworthy of the food he/she eats).
 - *Bapbeoli* (밥벌이, means of livelihood)

- 5. Hunger and the Projection of Eating in the Korean Language
- Bon Appetit
- "Eating" figures prominently in Korean popular sayings:
 - "*Geumgangsan gugyeongdo shikhugyeong*" (See the Diamond Mountains on a full stomach)
 - "The back of the head of the departing guest is beautiful"
 - "*Shikeunjuk meokgida*" (It's as easy as eating cold porridge)—It's a piece of cake
 - "*Nuweoseo ddeokmeokki*" (Eating rice cake lying down).

- Korean terms for “morning” and “breakfast” are the same as are “afternoon” and “lunch,” and “evening” and “dinner”
- Many popular expressions also pertain to eating, with the verb “*meokda*” added as a suffix:
- The family in Korean is “*shikgu*” literally meaning “eating mouths,” i.e., family comprises of members who eat together or, from the perspective of the parents, family means the “mouths to feed.”
- Nai*meokda*, literally meaning “eat age,” means “to age.”
- Maeum*meokda* (“eat a mind”): make up one’s mind
- Maeumeulgocheo*meokda* (“change a mind and eat”): change one’s mind

- Yokmeokda ("eat blame, insult"): to be blamed
- Yeotmeokda ("eat a sticky candy"; it is known that the stick candy is a metaphor for a penis, which is widely used as a slang): to be fooled, to be admonished
- Deowimeokda("eat heat")
- Noemulmeokda ("eat a bribe"): accept a bribe
- Doneulmeokda (eat money): take money
- Nallomeokda (eat raw): get profit or advantage without proper costs
- Geopmeokda ("eat a scare"): get scared
- Gamdongmeokda ("eat an emotion"): to be inspired or emotionally moved

- Example from the United States:
 - popular use of such terms as Americans, the World Series, use of the expression of “World champions,” etc.