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Review of *Language Change in East Asia*, edited by T. E. McAuley

by
Hyejin Krista Ryu

Victor H. Mair, Editor
Sino-Platonic Papers
Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations
University of Pennsylvania
Philadelphia, PA 19104-6305 USA
vmair@sas.upenn.edu
www.sino-platonic.org

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Review:

Language Change in East Asia, edited by T. E. McAuley

Hyejin Krista Ryu

University of Pennsylvania

As Thomas McAuley states in his introduction to his 2001 edited volume, *Language Change in East Asia*: "languages, like all living things, change." While it is true that no language has remained exactly the same as it had been in its earlier usage, the way each language has changed can still be very different. Based on the articles collected in this book, I have categorized the underlying reasons for change in languages into the following three main factors: (1) change in a society's norms and structure, (2) direct foreign influence, and (3) linguistic reasons that are non-societal. I will discuss each of these categories of causes by giving examples from some key articles in the book.

The first cause of language change in East Asia I want to discuss is change in societal norms and structures. More specifically, what I am referring to is the changes *within* a society in which the specific language in question is spoken, due to factors such as modernization, economic development, and improved education. For example, there are two main types of domestic societal changes to be observed in the articles published here. The first is the change in societal structure, or hierarchy, and the second is the change in gender roles.

The change in societal structure is observable through the change in the Korean honorific systems. Young-Key Kim-Renaud shows that the traditional elaborate honorific system in the Korean language has changed due to rapid changes in society, such as the abolishment of social classes, in "Change in Korean Honorifics Reflecting Social Change." According to her, "many earlier definitions of various interpersonal relationships have now become either obsolete or gained new meaning," which has resulted in changes such as the disuse of some and the invention of other forms of honorific markers.[1] For example, the number of honorific levels in terms of grammar has undergone simplification because the "suggestion of inequality amongst people has become, at least superficially, a taboo in Korean society."[2] This kind of societal change began in Korea with the abolition of the *yangban* class after the fall of the Joseon Dynasty in the early 1900s, and the introduction of Western ideas of democracy that gave power for political decision making to everyone, not just the bureaucracy or elites. In fact, Western-style emphasis on "individual human dignity has not only translated to showing respect to people… regardless of their social status," but also has made people more willing to assert themselves, and become unwilling to appear too subservient or self-effacing.[3] For example, the self-elevating and addressee-deifying suffix "-naita" has fallen into disuse in modern Korea, and it can only be observed now in historical dramas where the servants are addressing masters of higher social class.

The argument in Kim-Renaud's article that I find particularly interesting is about the rise of *panmal*, which means "half speech," which she characterizes as "an avoidance strategy to deal with ambivalent situations, in which the relative interpersonal relationships are not clearly definable." What Kim-Renaud suggests here is counter-intuitive, because *panmal*, as the name suggests, is not a formal way of speaking and is commonly understood as an "impolite" or even a "rude" form of speech. According to her article, however, *panmal* has become a critical part of modern day "honorific speech." The "-eyo" suffix attached to the *panmal* form, that is self-neutral and addressee-indeterminate, has now become the most commonly used "honorific" form in modern Korea. Such a phenomenon is surprising, as the "-eyo" form was not even considered a part of the address-honorific system in earlier books of Korean grammar.[4] The reason for this change as given by Kim-Renaud is that *panmal* is actually not inherently rude; it can be respectful if "used addressing a person who expects to be

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1 Young-Key Kim-Renaud, "Change in Korean Honorifics Reflecting Social Change," in *Language Change in East Asia*, ed. T. E. McAuley (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2001), 27.

2 Ibid., 28.

3 Ibid., 34.

4 Ibid.

spoken down to, but impertinent if used to a person who expects to be spoken up to."[5] It is precisely this ambiguity of *panmal*, that is, the non-specification of the power relationship between the speaker and the addressee, that has made the "*panmal* + eyo" form predominant in modern Korean society. The "*panmal* + eyo" form allows the speaker to address others with sufficient respect, but also without self-depreciation, which is convenient in contemporary Korea, in which social classes no longer exist and individuals are all equally important.

Societal change is also manifested in the change in gender roles in East Asian countries, especially the increased activity of women in society, especially at the workplace. Mieko Philip's "Are Japanese Women Less Feminine Now? A Study of Sentence-Final Forms in Japanese Women's Conversation" observes the ways in which this change in society's perception of gender roles has affected the speech of Japanese women.

Many Japanese particles and sentence-final forms are associated with the speaker's gender. For example, among different particles of assertion, "*wa*" is associated with feminine speech, while "*zo*" is associated with masculine speech.[6] The author hypothesizes that younger female Japanese speakers will use more gender neutral or masculine forms of speech. She bases her comments in part on a *New York Times* report, which found that "instead of using the traditional feminine-sounding declarative ending *wayo* most young female Japanese speakers nowadays use *dayo*, which traditionally has been considered the masculine equivalent."[7] This observation seems plausible to me, given the enhanced social status of women in Japan following economic development and equalized opportunity of education for both genders. To test this hypothesis, the author runs an experiment to study Japanese women's sentence-final forms through collecting data from listening to dialogues. She does indeed find that "younger speakers preferred neutral, or masculine-sounding endings," as compared to older speakers.[8]

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5 Ibid., 40.

6 Mieko Phillips, "Are Japanese Women Less Feminine Now? A Study of Sentence-Final Forms in Japanese Women's Conversation," in *Language Change in East Asia* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2001), 70.

7 Ibid., 71.

8 Ibid., 83.

One thing that is notable is that the speakers who exhibited the most classically "feminine" way of speech were Japanese women who had left Japan a few decades back. "Fossilization" has probably occurred, through which process the speaker's way of speaking becomes fixed as he or she moved to a new language-zone, and his or her previous language did not experience any additional inputs from outside to cause change. By contrast, older Japanese women who stayed in Japan during the same period were exposed to changes in Japanese society in which the status of women in society was rising. Because these societal changes were being expressed to and received by these women in Japanese, their way of speaking Japanese had to be influenced. This disparity even *within* the older woman group further supports the hypothesis by showing how much Japanese society has changed in the past few decades and how such change has influenced the way Japanese is spoken.

The second category of cause for language change in East Asia studied in this book is direct foreign influence. Karen Steffen Chung's "Some Returned Loans: Japanese Loanwords in Taiwan Mandarin" shows how an influx of foreign things, both physical goods and ideas, can impact language spoken in a given country in a way that *does not require domestic societal structural change*, which makes it distinct from the first category of cause discussed earlier. Chung gives examples of how the Japanese language influenced the Mandarin used in Taiwan because of the fifty years of Japanese occupation, continued through the ongoing cultural and economic exchange between Japan and Taiwan after 1945.

The first type of borrowing of Japanese words is based on the written form in Chinese characters. For example, the word 弁当 (*bento*) for lunchbox entered into Taiwanese Mandarin, and is read as "*biandang*," which replaced the more appropriate Chinese term 饭盒 (*fanhe*) in everyday speech.[9] Another type of borrowing is phonetic, in which the words later become transliterated using Chinese characters. For example, the Japanese word おばさん (*obasan*) for older woman is now included in Taiwanese Mandarin speech and written as 欧巴桑 (*oubasang*).[10] Another form of borrowing Chung discusses is the phenomenon of graphic loans, which can be exemplified by the

9 Karen Steffen Chung, "Some Returned Loans: Japanese Loanwords in Taiwan Mandarin," in *Language Change in East Asia* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2001), 163.

10 Ibid.

import of the character 丼 (*don*), commonly used for Japanese food that is in a bowl. This character, pronounced *dong*, previously had not even been used in modern Mandarin; it was imported with the spread of this specific Japanese food.[11] Finally, there has also been direct borrowing from Japanese that is purely based on meaning that was not transliterated into Mandarin, and is used in its original Japanese script, but read in a completely different way, based on the Mandarin pronunciation of a word that has the same meaning. An example is the Japanese possessive particle の (no). The Japanese script is directly used in posters, websites, and other signs, but normally read as *zhi* because of the similarity in meaning between the Japanese *no* and the Mandarin 之 (*zhi*).[12]

However, the most interesting phenomenon observed in this article is the re-borrowing, or the “return of loans.” For example, the word 馄饨 (*huntun*) was borrowed from Chinese into Japanese, and was read as “うどん (*udon*),” which actually developed into a dish that is completely different from the original 馄饨 (*huntun*.) So when this new dish, 馄饨 (*udon*), was introduced into China from Japan, the original word could no longer be used. To refer to this new “馄饨,” a new Mandarin word had to be created, which was 乌龙面 (*wulongmian*).[13] This observation reminded me of the “English” word “boba” used on the West Coast of the US to refer to Taiwanese bubble tea (or pearl milk tea, based on the mandarin word 珍珠奶茶). The word “boba” is based on the Taiwanese word for large tapioca bubbles put in milk teas, which was actually based on the English word for “boobs.” Hence, this is also a case of re-borrowing of words from one language to another; the English word was borrowed into Taiwanese, then this now “Taiwanese” word was re-borrowed into English to refer to something that is completely different from the original object it was referring to.

While Chung’s article discussed borrowing in spoken and written language, Nicolas Tranter’s “Script ‘Borrowing,’ Cultural Influence and the Development of the Written Vernacular in East Asia” discusses script borrowing. This type of borrowing is different from the example of language borrowing in Taiwan described above, because it is about borrowing a means of representing spoken language from another script system, and not about borrowing words and expressions to add to the

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11 Ibid., 168.

12 Ibid., 172.

13 Ibid., 166.

existing spoken language. For example, he discusses the development of the Japanese kana system from Chinese grass writing, the influence of phags-pa in the creation of hangul, and the impact of Chinese script on the development of both Khitan and Tangut written scripts.

I believe his key argument is his focus on the fact that the relationship between different East Asian scripts is fundamentally different from that of Eurasian scripts, such as Proto-Sinaitic and Brahmi-derived scripts.[14] Despite the fact that the history and process of development of the East Asian scripts are different from their Eurasian counterparts, many scholars see the relationships among East Asian scripts in the same way they see those of Eurasian scripts. For example, because Eurasian scripts are "generally seen in terms of families, with sister-scripts derived linearly from a mother-script in relationships that are possible…to represent in a family tree diagram."[15] He argues, however, that this family-based approach is misleading for East Asian scripts, because there is a much wider range of the types of influences scripts had on each other, which make their relationships not clearly linear.

For example, for the East Asian scripts in question, the influences can be on the forms, the principles of derivation/creation, as well as the principles of structure. The relationship between the earliest Korean *idu* and Chinese script is a form-based influence, as there is no "significant coining of new characters," but the Chinese characters are used to "write a language other than Chinese," based on the "word order of one's [the borrower's] own language."[16] On the other hand, the relationship between Vietnamese Chữ Nôm and Chinese script is best described as influence on the principles of derivation/creation. Many Chữ Nôm characters are based on the productive principles of 形声 (*xingsheng*) and 假借 (*jiajie*). For example, the Vietnamese word "*Chết*," which means "die," is represented using the two Chinese characters 折 and 死, with the 折 on top of 死. Here, the 折 represents the sound while the 死 represents the meaning, which is the same principle of creating

14 Nicolas Tranter, "Script 'Borrowing,' Cultural Influence and the Development of the Written Vernacular in East Asia," in *Language Change in East Asia* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2001), 183.

15 Ibid., 183.

16 Ibid., 192.

characters for Chinese called 形声 (*xingsheng*).[17] Finally, another type of influence is in principles of structure, which is represented by the relationship between Hangul and Chinese script. Hangul is formed within an ideal square, which shows how the structural principles are influenced by Chinese script, but not by any of the individual alphabets themselves. Hence, as shown in these aforementioned examples, the relationships among East Asian scripts cannot be described as linear "family" relationships, as in the case of Eurasian scripts. I believe Tranter's argument is valuable in highlighting the complex way that scripts within a region can influence each other, which is definitely more multidimensional than it is commonly believed to be.

The final category of reason that can be identified in this book is linguistic change that is not directly related to any societal change or cultural influence. For example, Taeko Goto talks about the decline of tense and aspect in Japanese. The causes of this he mentions are "the universal 'upward' tendency of grammaticalization in functional structure," and "the head-parameter of language in question," and "the language-specific property [of] agglutination."[18] Similarly, Andrew Simpson and Xiu-Zhi Zoe Wu talk about the ways in which the formal nouns and nominalizers, which are *de* in Chinese, *no* in Japanese, and *kes* in Korean, have become grammaticalized.[19] Finally, Youngjun Jang talks about how "flapping," or the phonological process of /t/→/l/ change has occurred from Old Chinese to Sino-Korean in his article, "Flapping and Language Change in East Asia."[20]

While the articles in this last group, highlighting the change in each East Asian language over time that causes both syntactic and phonetic changes, are interesting, neither the articles nor the overall book offers a real underlying cause for such change. The individual articles are mainly about observing the changes that have occurred and describing them linguistically, but they do not discuss

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17 Ibid., 193.

18 Taeko Goto, "On the Decline of Tense and Aspect in Japanese: Its Theoretical Implications," in *Language Change in East Asia* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2001), 248.

19 Andrew Simpson and Xiu-Zhi Zoe Wu, "The Grammaticalization of Formal Nouns and Nominalizers in Chinese, Japanese and Korean," in *Language Change in East Asia* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2001), 280.

20 Youngjun Jang, "Flapping and Language Change in East Asia," in *Language Change in East Asia* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2001), 295.

the reasons such change was happening. One might ask, for example, did these changes happen due to convenience of speech that is related to something in human nature, as shown in the case of the decreased number of consonants and vowels in Modern Korean as compared to the number in Old or Middle Korean?

Thus, while I believe the articles described in the previous two sections of this paper do a great job of linking language change to actual macro events such as societal change and interaction between different societies and cultures, those in the third section do not. I believe further research into this area addressing this question would add greatly to the value of the studies pursued in this volume.