Dialects in Diaspora or Diaspora Dialects: Distinguishing Transplanted Varieties of Korean

Despite very occasional recognition as varieties in their own right (e.g. King and Yeon 1992; Jin 2012), the varieties of Korean spoken outside the Korean peninsula and its adjoining islands are frequently equated with those which are spoken there (see Lee 2016 for a recent example). The current study focuses on the varieties of Korean spoken throughout Central Asia (Koryo Mar – KM) and in China’s Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture (Vernacular Yanbian Korean – VYK), both of which have been equated with the varieties of Hamgyeong Province (Pak 2005; Kwak 2011). While historical and linguistic evidence supports the diachronic link between the Korean communities of these regions and the North East of the Korean peninsula, this paper demonstrates that the continued designation of KM and VYK using the nomenclature of traditional peninsula dialects confuses linguistic heritage with synchronic linguistic reality.

Here, we test the implicit claim made by designating VYK and KM as “Hamgyeong Dialect” or “Yukchin Dialect”, i.e. that these varieties are ‘the same dialect’ and thus may not be systematically distinguished. Scarcity of secondary sources and the difficulty of gathering data within the DPRK preclude a direct comparison of these particular transplanted and peninsula varieties, however direct comparison of VYK and KM is possible.

For this purpose, corpora of these varieties, consisting of semi-structured interviews and observed speech events collected from 12 KM-speakers and 12 VYK-speakers, were created. From the transcription of this primary data, it is clear that a large number of features which have been identified as characteristic of each of these varieties, for example the phonological reduction of topic particles (Lee et al. 2001: 38; Jeong 2010: 57-59), in fact appear variably in both. As a supplement to this impressionistic analysis, and to determine whether the speech of these consultants differs systematically, we employ statistical tests. This required the creation of a top-down feature catalogue (Wolk and Szmrecsanyi 2016) comprised of thirty three variables selected on the basis of prior descriptions of the transplanted varieties and examination of the corpora. The data for each speaker was coded according to the presence or absence of each feature, which produced a distance matrix suitable for Cluster Analysis (CA) and Categorical Principal Components Analysis (CATPCA – Meulman, Heiser and SPSS 2004), techniques that have been called quantitative equivalents of traditional dialect identification and the establishment of isogloss bundles, respectively (Grieve et al. 2011).

The CA revealed that the speakers could be unambiguously sorted into two clusters corresponding to their membership of the KM or VYK speaking community. From the CATPCA, it was possible to identify a set of thirteen features which were particularly influential in this clustering. Of these, seven (for example, the adoption of the subject particle -ka and realisation of /c/ as an alveolar affricate) are associated with the speech of the VYK consultants and six (for example, the retention of archaic demonstrative pronouns of place and the realisation of /l/ as a trill) are associated with the speech of the KM consultants.

The central finding of this paper is that, on the basis of this data, KM and VYK may be considered systematically and regularly distinct from one another, which adds weight to the argument that new Korean dialects are emerging in transplanted contexts (Silva 2010; Nagy 2016). This paper also makes a contribution to the on-going expansion of Korean linguistics to cover the previously much understudied international varieties of the language.
References


