Integrating Analysis and Pedagogy in the Revitalization of Jejueo

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Language revitalization calls for the coordination of multiple research tracks, including orthographic design, phonological and morphological analysis, and curriculum development. We report here on how these tracks have come together in attempts to preserve and revitalize Jejueo, the language of Korea’s Jeju Island.

Jejueo is written using the same script (Hangul) that is used for Korean. Crucially, however, the traditional orthographic rules for Jejueo differ from those for Korean, favoring spellings that group letters into phonetic syllables rather than into morphemes. Thus to take a very simple example, the past tense form of the verb-plus-auxiliary compound ka-po (가보) ‘try to go’ is written as in (1), reflecting the boundaries between the word’s phonetic syllables. In contrast, the cognate form in Korean is written as in (2), reflecting the word-internal morphological boundaries and separating the past tense suffix -ess (었) [= Jejueo -es (엇)] from the sentence ender -e (어) [identical to its Jejueo counterpart]. (In these and all other examples, dots are used in the Romanization to indicate the way in which letters are clustered into chunks in the Hangul spelling.)

In cases such as this, where close cognates make the two languages very similar in form and meaning, the morphological structure of the Jejueo word is likely to be evident, regardless of how it is written. However, matters become much more complicated in the many verbal patterns that contain morphemes unique to Jejueo, as illustrated in (3) – (5). In such cases, syllable-based spelling has led some linguists to propose analyses that posit the existence of morphemes such as eom, seon, sin, nu, and nya (see, for example, Choi 1985, Lee 1957, and Sung 1975, among others)

However, analysis of a broader range of data suggests that such analyses are wrong, and that the morphemes in question are actually -ams, en, in, nun, and ya, respectively, as shown by their occurrence in this form (with the same meaning) in contexts where morpheme boundaries are independently identifiable. For the sake of exposition, we give just one example of each in (3’) – (5’), corresponding to (3) – (5), respectively.

In our presentation, we will consider the consequences of these findings for two major issues in Jejueo revitalization. First, we consider the ongoing debate over the selection of an orthography (on which there is still no consensus, other than that it should involve the Hangul script). Second, we will examine the role of orthography in language pedagogy, especially in light of recent findings that virtually all revitalization programs in the world now see school-based programs as the best strategy for language revitalization (Perez-Baez, Vogel & Okura 2017). Drawing on the experience of other communities, especially Hawaiian, and on our own analyses of Jejueo verbal morphology, we argue for the linguistic and pedagogical advantages of an orthography that maximizes the transparency of morphological boundaries, even if this forces a departure from phonetic transparency at the level of the syllable.
Abbrev: CONT = continuative; PST = past; PRS = present; Q = question; SE = sentence ender; dots are used to represent the clustering of letters in the orthography.

(1) Syllable-based spelling for a past tense form in Jejueo: ka.po.a.se (가보아서) try go PST SE ‘tried to go’

(2) Morpheme-based spelling for the Korean cognate: ka.po.ass.e (가보았어) go-try-PST-SE ‘tried to go’

Morphemes inferred from the orthography in other cases: *am, sen, sin, nu, nya*

(3) ka.po.am.seon.key (가보암선게) go try CONT PST SE ‘I saw him/her trying to go’

(4) ka.po.am.sin.dido (가보암신디도) go try CONT PRS although ‘although s/he is trying to go’

(5) ka.po.nu.nya (가보느나) go try PRS SE ‘Is s/he trying to go?’

Actual morphemes yielded by morphological analysis: *ams, en, in, nun, ya*

(3’) ka.po.ams.en.key (가보앞언게) go-try-CONT-PST-SE ‘I saw him/her trying to go’

Evidence that *-ams* is a morpheme: ka.po.ams.cwu (가보앞주) go-try-CONT-SE ‘S/he is trying to go.’

Evidence that *-en* is a morpheme: cisul mek-en (먹언) ‘ate’ potato eat-PST ‘S/he ate a potato.’

(4’) ka.po.ams.in-dido (가보앞인디도) go-try-CONT-PRS-ALTHOUGH ‘although s/he is trying to go’

Evidence that *-in* is a morpheme: taws-in-dido (돗인디도) warm-PRS-although ‘although it is warm’

(5’) ka-nun-ya (가논야) go-PRS-Q ‘Is s/he going?’

Evidence that *-nun* is a morpheme: ka-po-nun-ka (가보늘가) ‘Is s/he trying to go?’

Evidence that *-ya* is a morpheme: ka-po-as-ya? (가보앞야) go-try-PST-Q ‘Has s/he tried to go?’