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THE KOREAN LANGUAGE: HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT AND LINGUISTIC CHARACTERISTICS

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Annotation: This article examines the historical development and main linguistic features of the Korean language. It highlights the role of Hangul, the influence of Chinese and English on Korean vocabulary, and the language's phonetic, grammatical, and lexical characteristics. The study also discusses the differences between the standard varieties of North and South Korea and the key aspects of Korean language education.

Keywords: Korean language, Hangul, linguistic development, grammar, phonetics, vocabulary.

Introduction. The Korean language is considered one of the oldest and most distinctive languages in East Asia. Its formation and development encompass a long historical process. According to linguists, Korean has not been conclusively classified within any specific language family, although it is often compared to the Altaic languages and is generally described as an agglutinative language. This characteristic is associated with its grammatical structure, in which various grammatical meanings are expressed through affixes while the root of a word remains largely unchanged. Historically, Korean is an ancient language whose origin and development have undergone several stages. This reflects an important phase in the evolution of Korean, demonstrating a long-standing integration between the native language and an imported writing system. As a result of the influence of Chinese writing, a large number of Sino-Korean words entered the language, and this influence continues to the present day. The earliest forms of Korean can be traced back to the ancient Korean kingdoms of Goguryeo, Baekje, and Silla. During this period, the language developed primarily as an oral language, while Chinese characters (*Hanja*) were used as the writing system. Consequently, the earliest written records of Korean are highly complex and difficult to interpret [1:67].

Main Part. One of the most significant events in the history of the Korean language was the creation of the Hangul writing system by King Sejong the Great in the fifteenth century. This writing system was developed in 1443 and officially promulgated in 1446. Hangul was designed to improve literacy among ordinary people and to provide Korean with an independent writing system. The creation of Hangul marked a major turning point in the history of the Korean language. Linguists have described Hangul as "one of the most scientifically designed and sophisticated phonetic writing systems in the world." The modern form of Korean developed primarily after the Joseon Dynasty. In particular, the political and social transformations that occurred in Korean society during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries had a profound impact on the language. Following the division of the Korean Peninsula into North and South Korea in the mid-twentieth century, two standard varieties of Korean emerged. In South Korea, the Seoul dialect became the basis of the standard language, whereas North Korea developed a different normative system. This division led to certain differences in vocabulary and pronunciation [2:45]. Furthermore, Chinese has exerted a considerable influence on the development of Korean, as a significant proportion of scientific and official terminology is derived from Chinese roots. In recent decades, loanwords from English have also become increasingly widespread. The growing number of English-derived

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lexical items in contemporary Korean reflects the impact of globalization on the language.The Korean language occupies a unique position among East Asian languages due to its grammatical structure, phonetic system, and distinctive writing system. As an agglutinative language, Korean primarily expresses grammatical meanings through affixation, while the lexical root generally remains unchanged. Therefore, word order and the placement of grammatical markers play a crucial role in determining sentence meaning. The phonological system of Korean consists of 21 vowels and 19 consonants, contributing to the clarity and melodic quality of speech. Certain sounds, particularly tense consonants such as ㄲ, ㄸ, and ㅃ, do not exist in Uzbek and therefore pose challenges for Uzbek learners of Korean. In addition, Korean frequently exhibits phonological processes such as assimilation and liaison (연음 현상), which result in changes in pronunciation during connected speech. Proper use of intonation and stress is also essential for accurately conveying meaning [3:102]. From a grammatical perspective, Korean follows an agglutinative structure in which grammatical meanings are formed through the addition of suffixes to nouns and verbs. The typical sentence order is Subject–Object–Verb (SOV). Although this feature bears some resemblance to Uzbek, the complexity of Korean verbal morphology distinguishes it as a unique linguistic system. One of the most important grammatical features of Korean is the honorific system (존댓말). This system requires speakers to modify their language according to the age, social status, and situational context of the interlocutor. Consequently, it represents a new and often challenging grammatical phenomenon for Uzbek learners. Moreover, grammatical categories such as tense, negation, desire, and imperative mood are formed through the addition of various suffixes to verbal stems, demonstrating the systematic nature of Korean grammar. The Korean lexicon consists of three major layers: native Korean words, Sino-Korean vocabulary, and modern loanwords (primarily from English). Chinese-derived words are especially prevalent in the fields of science, technology, and academia. In recent years, the number of English loanwords has increased significantly. Examples include 컴퓨터 (*computer*), 인터넷 (*internet*), and 핸드폰 (*mobile phone*). This trend illustrates the growing role of Korean as a language adapting to global linguistic influences. Another notable characteristic of Korean vocabulary is the abundance of synonyms and homonyms. Furthermore, the existence of specialized honorific lexical items reflects the cultural richness and social sensitivity embedded within the language.

The development of the Korean language has been shaped by several key factors:

1. **Chinese Influence** – Many scientific and official terms are derived from Chinese roots.
2. **The Hangul Writing System** – The primary factor that enabled the independent development of the Korean language.
3. **Modern Globalization** – The increasing influx of English loanwords and newly coined terminology.
4. **Social and Political Division** – The emergence of distinct linguistic standards in North and South Korea.

Linguists describe the development of Korean as “a continuous process of adaptation,” as the language constantly incorporates new vocabulary and grammatical forms. Although Korean language education has become highly developed worldwide, it is still premature to define all of its characteristics comprehensively. Nevertheless, several key features can be identified:

1. Korean language education constitutes a specialized system designed primarily for foreign learners;
2. It emphasizes rapid and practical language acquisition;
3. Language and culture are taught in an integrated manner;
4. Significant attention is devoted to the development of speaking skills;
5. The communicative approach occupies a central position in the teaching and learning process.

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