Urbanicity, Variation, and the Standard: Koreans’ Perceptions of the Seoul Dialect

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Studies in perceptual dialectology conducted in the U.S. (cf. Dennis Preston, 1989) have shown that people have strong opinions about the number and placement of dialect regions. Similar studies in other parts of the world have corroborated these results in Japan (Long 1999); France (Kuiper 1999); the Netherlands (Rensink 1999); and in the UK (Montgomery 2007). There has been relatively little research conducted in this area on Korean, however, with early studies using only short language attitude surveys. An exception is Long and Yim (2002) who conducted the most extensive study to date incorporating the methods of perceptual dialectology and language attitude research.

The present study is an extension of Long and Yim (2002), but differs in its method of investigation in an important way. This study highlights the importance of urban areas in perception (Montgomery and Beal 2011). It uses ArcGIS to geo-reference hand-drawn maps from 436 Koreans living in areas that represent the dialect regions outlined in Long and Yim (2002). During this process, dialect categories for subjects’ perceptions in and of Seoul were identified and mapped. The most salient perceptual categories for Seoul were examined to get a better understanding of the dialect image and ideology associated with the city. In addition, demographic information was correlated with results showing how subjects’ perceptions are stratified by factors like age, sex, time spent living in the dialect region, and identification as rural, suburban, or urban.

A preliminary analysis of these data suggests that Koreans’ perceptions of dialect regions are not limited by province boundaries as suggested by Long and Yim (2002). In fact, the data reveals not only perceptions of dialect variation unassociated with administrative borders, but also taps into the way people connect ideas about language and place (Johnstone 2010). By highlighting the role of urban areas in perceiving dialect differences, these findings shed new light on the relationship between urbanicity and language variation and change in Seoul. The results from this study have implications for perceptual dialectology, language attitudes research, and urban linguistic ecologies.

References


