

# *Research on Bilingual Phenomena in Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture*

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**Keywords:** Yanbian, China, the Korean nationality, bilingual phenomena

**Abstract:** Taking the bilingual phenomena in the Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture as the research object, this article reviews the trend and development direction of Korean language evolution in Yanbian by examining the language variation in the long-term Korean-Chinese bilingual contact in the region and the changes of language attitudes and language use among the Korean nationality. The results show that the use of Korean is weakened, and some young Korean minorities switch to another language. Therefore, this article proposes that Yanbian should focused on bilingual education, optimize national language textbooks, increase Korean-Chinese national cultural courses, improve the quality of bilingual teachers, connect parents, schools and society, and strengthen national identity.

## **1. Introduction**

Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture is the largest settlement of the Korean nationality in China, with 42.3% of the Korean population in China living there. With the implementation of the bilingual education policy, most Koreans in Yanbian speak Chinese in addition to their mother tongue Korean, which gradually helps form a typical bilingual society. In the process of Korean-Chinese language contact, since Chinese is a common language and a strong language, Korean is greatly influenced and faces decreasing use scope and the weakening language functions. To be specific, there appear problems such as borrowing words, mixed language use between Korean and Chinese and language conversion in Korean-Chinese contact. Based on previous research on bilingual development in Yanbian, this article explores the bilingual phenomena in this region, points out the problems in the current stage of development, and makes feasible suggestions for the protection of Korean language, which may provide some insights for the protection of other ethnic minority languages.

This article are divided into six chapters. Chapter one is a brief introduction; chapter two mainly reviews previous related studies; chapter three analyzes the causes of bilingualism in Yanbian from social and historical perspectives; chapter four introduces the characteristics of the bilingual phenomena in Yanbian; chapter five analyzes the phenomena of language conversion in Yanbian and proposes some suggestions; and chapter six is a summary.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Previous Studies of Bilingual Phenomena

The research on bilingual phenomena in China has mainly explored the bilingualism and bilingual education in ethnic regions. Xerin'ay Mahsut (2001) investigated the language habits, language attitudes and bilingual proficiency of “Minkaohan”<sup>1</sup> through questionnaires. [1] The results showed that the Chinese proficiency of most “Minkaohan” was higher than their national language proficiency, and they held a positive attitude towards both national languages and Chinese. Zhang Mingxian and Yang Wenhua (2006) found through fieldwork that different genders and different ages led to different bilingual abilities of the Buyi people in Luoping. [2] They pointed out that the language evolution of this ethnic group was caused by multiple factors. Scholars specializing in the study of minority languages in Yunnan, China include Zhao Min (2009), Zhu Maoyun (2009), Jiang Lina (2017), Qi Wenxiu (2011), Chang Junzhi (2010), etc. Among them, Zhao Min and Zhu Maoyun (2009) described the bilingual phenomena of the Hani people in Yangjie Township, Yunnan, and pointed out that their mother tongue can be used stably and retained for a long time mainly due to some external conditions such as high concentration, traffic and information blockage, fixed economic model, long-term intra-ethnic marriages, and national cohesion. Jiang Lina (2017) analyzed the bilingualism of the Mongolian Kazuo people in Yunnan, and discussed the current situation, causes and impact of bilingual harmony. There are also some researchers studying bilingual education in ethnic areas. Dai Qingxia et al. (2007) analyzed the use of kino in Yunnan and pointed out that school education was the key to the establishment of bilingualism. [3] Teng Xing (2011) elaborated on the development process and concept of bilingual education in Xinjiang and concluded that the ultimate goal of Xinjiang-Chinese bilingual education should be to cultivate bilingual talents speaking both Chinese and the minority language. The implementation of bilingual education can promote national unity and national unity. Wang Chunlei (2014) discussed the problems of bilingual education in Dehong Prefecture, Yunnan based on the realities of bilingual education there. Peng Hui (2015) analyzed the development and problems of minority languages and dialects in China under the influence of Chinese, who argued that bilingual education should meet market demand and social development and cultivate professional foreign language talents. [4]

The research on bilingualism in South Korea mainly focuses on the language ability of bilingual children and the bilingual ability and education of the second generation of immigrants. Ji-yun Park, Sang-hee Park and Dong-il Shi (2007) compared the language characteristics of children in bilingual environments and Korean monolingual children based on morphology, who adopted statistical methods of one-way analysis of variance and repeated two-way analysis of variance to test the characteristics of bilinguals and monolinguals. [5] They discovered that Korean monolingual children possessed more language forms than bilingual children and that the average speech length of monolinguals was higher than that of bilinguals. Seong Man Park and Sang Hee Bae (2013) interviewed Korean immigrants and their children in English-French bilingual areas in Canada, who conducted a survey of their sociolinguistic environment and pointed out three social factors that affected the language development of immigrants. [7] First, English, French and immigrants' mother tongue coexist and are actually used in mainstream Canadian society and communities. Second, the French proficiency of Korean adult immigrants is poor. Third, English is used more in Korean immigrant society in Montreal, Canada. Korean scholars Sul Eunhye and Youngjoo Kim (2017) discussed the language comprehension ability of seven-year-old Korean-

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<sup>1</sup> They are students of Uyghur, Kazakh, Mongolian and other ethnic minorities who have received education with Chinese as instruction medium and sit college entrance examination in Chinese. Today this term generally refers to all ethnic minority students studying in schools taught in Chinese

Chinese bilingual children. They found that family language development of bilingual children is better than community language development, and that the family language ability of these children was equivalent to that of monolingual children. [6]

## 2.2. Previous Studies of Bilingual Phenomena in Yanbian

here are relatively few studies of bilingual phenomena in Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture. From the perspective of research content, China and South Korea has mostly focused on the cause analysis of bilingual phenomena and bilingual education. In *Causes of Korean Bilingualism*, Guan Xinqiu (2001) started with various factors restricting the formation and evolution of bilingualism and explained in detail the internal and external reasons for the formation of Korean-Chinese bilingualism. Park Meiyu and Su Jinzhi (2014) pointed out that under the dual influence of social changes and language contact, the language function of Korean in Yanbian had been impacted and Chinese had become the most used language in public places. From the perspective of cross-border languages, they conducted on-site investigations on the ethnic language status in Yanbian Korean schools, sorted out the problems of Korean language education, and proposed some solutions. In *Analysis of the Development of Yanbian Korean Bilingual Education*, Huang Shengtian (2011) analyzed the time and teaching materials of ethnic language education in Yanbian Korean schools and found that the Korean students didn't master both Chinese and Korean well. He argued that Korean should be the main language and Chinese be a supplementary instruction medium. South Korean scholar Park Taehyeong (1995) analyzed the Korean language curriculum in Korean primary schools in 1950, 1980, and 1983, and discussed the future of Korean-Chinese education of Korea-Chinese overseas. [8] Based on the educational institutions, teachers, learners, etc. of the Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture, Choi Mihwa (2018) explored the current status of bilingual education and the curriculum for Korean Chinese and summarized the results and problems of bilingual education for Korean people overseas. [9]

In summary, previous research on bilingual phenomena is relatively rich. While relevant research content in China has mainly focused on the bilingual phenomena arising from the contact between minority languages and Chinese, relevant research in South Korea has paid more attention to the bilingual education of the second generation of immigrants. However, studies of Korean-Chinese bilingualism are rare. The research content is relatively limited and studies of bilingualism in Yanbian area are even fewer.

## 3. Causes of Bilingualism in Yanbian

The reasons for the emergence of bilingual phenomena in Yanbian can be roughly divided into three parts, that is, the multi-ethnic national conditions, the implementation of bilingual education, and the needs of social life.

First, since China is a multi-ethnic country, ethnic minorities have frequent contacts with the Han people and other ethnic groups in their daily life. As a common language, Chinese possesses a greater social influence and richer functions. Koreans in Yanbian learn Chinese spontaneously, which gradually forms a bilingual phenomenon in the region. Second is about the implementation of bilingual education. Yanbian has implemented policy of bilingual education for decades. During this period, a large number of bilingual talents have been trained, who in turn have played a significant role in promoting the formation of bilingual society in Yanbian. Third is about the needs of social life. China and South Korea established diplomatic relations in 1992, which provided new employment opportunities for the Korean nationality in China. Therefore, many people have attached great importance to bilingual learning in order to obtain better employment and educational resources, which is also an important reason for the formation of bilingualism in Yanbian.

#### 4. Characteristics of Bilingual Phenomena in Yanbian

At the end of the Qing Dynasty, a large number of North Korean refugees moved to Yanbian. During the joint development of Yanbian by the Han and Korean ethnic groups, the contact between Korean and Chinese became increasingly close. Korean and Chinese has infiltrated and influenced each other in the process of language contact. While Chinese has mainly influenced Korean in terms of words, Korean has affected Chinese grammar.

According to the research of Huang Yuhua and Wang Ying (2020), the influence of Chinese on Korean can be summarized as borrowing words from Chinese, Korean-Chinese mixed words, and changes in the form of Korean language. [10] Borrowing words from Chinese can be divided into Chinese words and proper nouns reflecting new things and new states. The former type includes some basic Korean vocabularies such as 전부 (all), 시간 (time), 철두철미 (throughout), etc. Most words of the latter category cannot be found in the Korean language, so they are formed by borrowing phonetics of some Chinese vocabularies. Typical examples are 경제특별구 (Special Economic Zone), 정신문명 (spiritual civilization), 물질문명 (material civilization), etc. The characteristic of Korean-Chinese mixed words is that Chinese words are used as roots to be combined with Korean words, which can be seen through the following daily communication in Yanbian area:

가: 奶茶 먹겠으무 美食城 앞에 있재 门市房 거기를 가면 奶茶 맛있는 게 있다.  
나: 내일 주말인데 购物 하러 가자!

In this example, “奶茶 (milk tea) 먹겠으무”, “美食城 (food court) 앞에”, “门市房 (shop front), and “购物 (shopping) 하러” are phrases combined by Chinese loanwords and Korean vocabulary, which have become unique mixtures of Chinese and Korean words over time. In addition, the changes in the form of Korean are mainly reflected in lexical morphology. According to Cui Xixiu’s research, Korean case-auxiliary words indicating passiveness and activeness and continuation suffixes are often omitted under the influence of Chinese.

The influence of Korean language on Chinese is mainly reflected in grammar. In particular, Korean has affected the word order of Chinese. The phenomenon of object preposition often appears in daily communication in Yanbian area. Examples of daily communication in the area are as follows:

A: 你 (You) 什么 (what) 东西 (things) 拿着啊 (hold)?

가: 니 무스거 가지고 있니?

B: 超市 (Supermarket) 水果 (fruit) 打折 (discount), 西瓜 (watermelon) 一个 (one) 买了啊 (buy)。

나: 초쓰에 과일 打折한다. 수박을 한 개 샀다

By comparing the Chinese and Korean in examples A and B, it can be found that “什么东西拿着啊 (what things hold)” and “西瓜买了一个啊 (watermelon bought a)” both reflect obvious object prepositions affected by Korean word order.

#### 5. Analysis of Language Conversion Phenomena in Yanbian

In recent years, there have been obvious intergenerational differences in the use of Korean and Chinese in Yanbian. And the resulting phenomenon of language conversion has attracted much attention. Language conversion in Yanbian mainly refers to the conversion from Korean to Chinese (hereinafter referred to as “Korean to Han”). According to the conclusions of Dai Qingxia and

Wang Yuanxin (1987), the language conversion phenomena of Korean in China can be roughly divided into three levels from the degree of conversion. The first level is that all Korean natives convert to Chinese, which mainly happens in Chinese communities and Chinese-Korean cross-ethnic marriages. The second level is that most Koreans switch to Chinese, which mainly happens in Korean communities that have close contact with the Chinese communities. The third level is that a small number of Koreans switch to Chinese, which mainly exists in border areas with stable bilingual contacts. According to this criterion, the “Korean to Han” in Yanbian should belong to the third level, with some Korean people switching to Chinese.

The phenomenon of “Korean to Chinese” in Yanbian have two main manifestations. One is that more and more Korean youths are proficient in Chinese and neglect Korean learning, which leads to the decrease of Korean proficiency. The other is that more and more Koreans choose to use Chinese in formal occasions and daily communication, and abandon the use of Korean.

Many scholars have put forward different views on the causes of language conversion. Thomas (1990) believes that economic factors are the specific factors that lead to language conversion. Brenzinger et al. (1991) pointed out that population changes would directly lead to language conversion. Mukherjee (1996) argued that language status was an important factor resulting in language conversion. The emergence of “Korean to Han” in Yanbian is a direct result of the long-term contact between the two languages. The reasons for this conversion are complex and diverse. Taking into account many opinions of previous scholars and the realities of Yanbian, this article discusses this issue from three points including internal cause, use environment, and attitudes towards the use of Korean and Chinese.

First of all, the internal reason is the long-term lack of uniform norms and standards for the use of Korean in Yanbian, which has made it more difficult for the young generation to learn Korean. According to Gao Si (2019), incomplete statistics have shown that only a small number of Korean youths living in cities and towns can accurately pronounce Korean unique words such as 개혁하다 (term begins), 돌출하다 (outstanding, excellent), 엄중하다 (severe), and 발동하다 (to start).

Second is that the influence from society, family and other language use environments has gradually led to language conversion. In the context of the national vigorous promotion of Putonghua, the establishment of Chinese schools, and the implementation of bilingual education, statistics from Yanbian show that the proportion of primary and secondary school students choosing Chinese schools in this region is increasing year by year. Besides, Chinese school students have gradually lost the ability to speak Korean because they are in contact with Chinese for a long time in Chinese communities and have fewer opportunities to learn and use Korean. Other age groups also face similar problems. There has a continuous outflow of Koreans in Yanbian in recent year. As a result, the Han population has gradually surpassed the Korean population to become the dominant ethnic group in the region; and Chinese has become a strong language there. This has also led to the fact that most Koreans prefer to use Chinese instead of Korean in formal occasions and daily communication.

The third reason is that the Koreans themselves have different attitudes towards Korean-Chinese bilingualism. After the founding of the People’s Republic of China, the Koreans in Yanbian gradually realized the importance of Chinese with the economic development, who had greater enthusiasm for learning Chinese and were more inclined to learn and use Chinese. As the State promotes bilingual education, parents come to realize that Chinese has a wider scope of application and means better educational resources and employment opportunities. Therefore, they are more inclined to choose Han schools for their children rather than Korean schools. At the same time, since Korean language lacks unified norms and standards, young people usually prefer to learn and use systematic and standardized Chinese. It is acknowledged that language attitude is an important

element of language behavior, which determines that language learning and protection can be promoted only by changing language attitude.

## 6. Conclusion

The contact between Chinese and Korean is a direct contact between different cultures. As a minority language, Korean is inevitably under the continuous influence from the common language Chinese. According to Thomas (2001)'s classification of borrowing and language contact levels, Korean-Chinese bilingualism in Yanbian is a bilingual contact with high intensity, indicating that the contact of Korean and Chinese is long-term and far-reaching. Although the contact between the two languages is conducive to cultural exchanges between different ethnic groups, it may hamper the protection of the mother tongue of the Korean nationality. Currently, the Korean people's ability to use Korean has been gradually weakened in Yanbian. In order to protect the diversity of ethnic languages, the author makes some feasible suggestions in the following.

First, it is necessary to make standards of using Korean and maintain the vitality of this language. Second, it is worthwhile to enhance the teaching of both Korean and Chinese, improve the faculty and teaching quality of Korean schools, and make reasonable arrangements for Korean textbooks and teaching materials. Third, it is advisable to strengthen the economic development in Yanbian to reduce the outflow of Korean population there and promote the development of Korean communities. Fourth, greater efforts should be made to teach young people ethnic culture. Language identity is an important factor influencing language behavior. Only by strengthening ethnic languages identity and increasing the cognition of ethnic languages can we fundamentally promote the inheritance and protection of minority languages. Fifth, schools and families should work together to encourage students to speak Korean at home. The above measures are aimed at encouraging the Koreans in Yanbian to use Korean and promoting the formation of Korean communities so as to solve the problems of language conversion caused by the long-term language contact between Korean and Chinese and protect the diversity of ethnic languages.

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