

Drawing boundaries and revealing language attitudes: the relationship of language and place in Korea

Lisa Jeon (*University of North Texas*)

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 Brazil (Preston 1985); in Japan (Long 1999); in Turkey (Demirci and Kleiner 1999); in Hungary (Kontra 2002); and in Germany (Dailey-O’Cain 1999). 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 methods of investigation in two key ways. First, this study includes the “Draw a Map” task (Preston 1989) used in Long and Yim (2002); however, it removes the province boundaries to reduce the effect of geo-spatial components on cultural organization of folk knowledge. Second, this study adapts the “Pile-Sort” task (Tamasi 2003), which completely removes geo-spatial components from the data collection, in order to provide a potentially less biased account of folk perceptions—such as social traits and status—typically associated with speech. The subjects for this study were all native-speaking Korean immigrants living in a large metropolitan area in the U.S. who represent the dialect regions outlined in Long and Yim (2002). Subjects completed the “Draw a Map” task and two months later completed the “Pile-Sort” task.

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 removal of geo-spatial restrictions from the survey instrument reveals not only the perceptions of dialect variation unassociated with geographic borders, but also taps into the way people connect ideas about language and place (Johnstone 2011). The results from this study have implications both for perceptual dialectology and language attitudes research.