

# Study on Strategies of Teaching Chinese Vocabulary to South Korean Students\*

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The number of Chinese-learning South Korean students is on the rise. Compared with the learners in Europe and the United States, they have different learning characteristics. Therefore, different teaching strategies should be adopted. Vocabulary learning is an important part of Chinese learning. Sino-Korean words are widely used in various fields and become an important part of Korean. Sino-Korean words have positive and negative effects on South Korean students' Chinese learning. This paper analyzes the Level 3 vocabulary in the new HSK syllabus, compares the vocabulary with the corresponding Sino-Korean words, and then proposes teaching suggestions.

*Keywords:* Sino-Korean words (Korean words of Chinese origin), comparative analysis, vocabulary teaching, teaching suggestions

## Introduction

According to statistics released on the website of the Ministry of Education, the number of international students from South Korea is ranked first by country in the number of foreign students coming to China and this number is still growing. It can be seen that learners with the Korean language background have become the largest Chinese-learning group in China. However, in the current practice of teaching Chinese as a foreign language, it seems that the Korean background of these students does not get enough attention.

## Research Background and Purpose

Korean is an agglutinative language with its grammatical structure completely different from that of Chinese, an isolated language. However, in terms of vocabulary, Korean vocabulary is quite related to modern Chinese vocabulary. In terms of the vocabulary composition of Korean, Korean consists of native Korean words, Sino-Korean words and foreign words. Among them, Sino-Korean words have the highest proportion. In the 164,125 words collected in the "Grand Dictionary" (1961) edited by the Korean HNGEUL Society, Sino-Korean words account for 52.11%; in the 275,854 words collected in the "National Language Dictionary" (1961) edited by Li Xisheng, Sino-Korean words account for 69.32%. The so-called Sino-Korean words are those words from China that are expressed in the Korean grammatical structure using Korean pronunciation habits in the Korean

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\* **Acknowledgements:** This paper is supported by Beijing Municipal Education Committee research Foundation SM201610009004; the Belt and Road National Talent training base project of NCUT; the outstanding Young Innovative Talents Program of NCUT (2017); Youth research and Innovation Fund of NCUT (1743025).

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language life. The Korean words used to write such words often correspond to one or more Chinese characters. In the process of learning Chinese vocabulary, Chinese learners with the Korean language background are susceptible to the influence of Sino-Korean words in their mother tongue and transfer the meaning and usage of Sino-Korean words to Chinese. This can be a major advantage for them to learn Chinese vocabulary, but also the cause of errors at the same time.

### **Research Content and Methods**

This paper analyzes the Level 3 vocabulary in the new HSK syllabus. The reason why the Level 3 vocabulary is chosen is that it includes both simple nouns, verbs, and various abstract words and can fully reflect the characteristics of Sino-Korean words. For the comparison and contrast between Chinese and Korean, this paper only compares the meanings of words and will not involve grammatical functions if unnecessary because the two languages belong to different language families with relatively large grammatical differences. For the discussion of Sino-Korean words and their corresponding Chinese characters, this paper ignores the differences in the character forms of traditional and simplified Chinese characters. As long as there is a correspondence between the simplified Chinese characters in modern Chinese and the traditional Chinese characters, to which the Sino-Korean words correspond, the Sino-Korean words and the simplified Chinese characters will be regarded as the same.

In this paper, “Modern Chinese Dictionary” (fifth edition) is referred to for interpretation of Chinese words, and “Korean-Chinese Dictionary” is referred to for interpretation of Korean words. Based on classification of the form and meaning of words, a comparative analysis of word meanings is conducted to study the influence on Chinese vocabulary teaching to South Korean learners according to different categories.

### **Classification and Analysis of HSK Level 3 Vocabulary**

#### **Words With the Same Form and Meaning**

There are 63 words with almost the same forms and meanings, accounting for 36.84% in the HSK Level 3 vocabulary.

In this paper, the form means Chinese character form. There is no morphological change in Chinese, and the form of Chinese characters is what they look like. For a Sino-Korean word, the word form is the Chinese character to which the Korean character of the Sino-Korean word corresponds. For example, the Chinese character to which “북” corresponds is “北” (north) and the Chinese character to which “방” corresponds is “方” (direction), so “북방” corresponds to “北方” (north). Another two examples of this kind of correspondence are “도시” and “都市” (city) and “청소” and “清掃” (clean) respectively. If the meaning of a Sino-Korean word is basically the same as that of its corresponding Chinese character in modern Chinese, then it is a word among the vocabulary words with the same form and meaning.

If these words are analyzed in detail, they can be roughly divided into absolute synonyms and relative synonyms. Relative synonym refers to the words with the same rational meaning but different emotions, style colors, etc., in the two languages. Although relative synonyms may cause errors to a certain extent, such errors are mainly misuses without distinction between commendatory words and derogatory words as well as between spoken language and written language. The differences in emotion and style come from different natural and

geographical conditions and political and cultural factors in the two countries. Absolute synonyms are words that have no distinction between forms, meanings, emotions, and style colors. Such words are mainly simple nouns, some simple adjectives, and verbs. Absolute synonyms do not cause errors easily unless the Sino-Korean word corresponds to more than one Chinese words which have the same pronunciation, such as “필수” corresponding to “必須” (must) and “必需” (required). This situation will cause some obstacles in the process of Chinese character acquisition.

### **Words With the Same Form and Partial Overlap in Meaning**

“Words with the same form and partial overlap in meaning” means that some meanings of a Sino-Korean word are the same as those of its corresponding Chinese character in modern Chinese and some are not. As a result of changes in social life, there are differences between Sino-Korean words and Chinese words. However, because the two are homologous, their fundamental and original meaning can still be reflected in the modern universal meanings and there are both differences and similarities. With the evolution of word meaning, words with the same form and partial overlap in meaning can be roughly divided into four groups: (1) The semantic scope of Chinese is wider than that of Korean; (2) the semantic scope of Korean is wider than that of Chinese; (3) the semantic scopes of the Chinese and Korean are partially same; and (4) words in the two languages have the same form but completely different meanings. This case is relatively rare.

**Semantic scope of Chinese is wider than that of Korean.** The words in this group refer to the Sino-Korean words with meanings less than those of their corresponding Chinese words. For example, “经验” (experience) in Chinese can be interpreted as (1) knowledge or skills derived from practice (noun); and (2) experience (verb). However, “경험 (經驗) 하다” only has the meaning of “experience” as a verb.

**Semantic scope of Korean is wider than that of Chinese.** The words in this group refer to the Sino-Korean words with meanings more than those of their corresponding Chinese words. For example, “锻炼” (exercise) has three meanings in Chinese: (1) forging or smelting; (2) strengthening the body through sports; and (3) increasing awareness and working ability through productive labor, social struggles, and work practices. However, meanings of “단련 (鍛煉) 하다 (exercise)” include not only smelting, physical exercise, tempering oneself, but also the meaning of “practice” that the corresponding Chinese words do not have.

**Semantic scopes of the Chinese and Korean are partially the same.** The words in this group refer to the Sino-Korean word with some of its meanings the same as those of its corresponding Chinese word and some different from those of its corresponding Chinese word. This phenomenon is due to the fact that the same word retains different ancient meanings or produces different meanings in the languages of the two countries. For example, “敢” (dare) has the following meanings in Chinese: (1) have courage and boldness; (2) an auxiliary verb that indicates having the courage to do something; (3) an auxiliary verb that indicates making judgment with assurance; and (4) <Written language> a self-depreciatory expression for asking someone for (doing) something. However, its corresponding Sino-Korean word “감 (敢) 히” has two meanings in Korean: (1) a self-depreciatory expression, indicating taking the liberty of asking someone for (doing) something; doing something rashly; and (2) too bold and dare to do something. It can be seen that “감 (敢) 히” does not have the meaning (2) and (3) of its corresponding Chinese word and that the Chinese word does not have the meaning (2) of “감 (敢) 히”. Although in some special situations and in Chinese spoken language, “敢” (dare) sometimes

can be used to express the meaning (2) of “감 (敢) 히”, but it requires a certain tone and a specific context. In Chinese written language, such meaning should be expressed by the words of “竟然敢 (too bold and dare to do something)”.

### Words With the Same Form but Completely Different Meanings

The words in this group are quite rare in Korean and Chinese. There are “新闻” (news) and “신문 (新聞)” in the HSK-Level 3 vocabulary. In Chinese, “新闻” (news) refers to news reported by newspapers, news agencies, radio stations, and television stations or the latest event in the society. However, “신문 (新聞)” (newspapers) in Korean generally refers to newspapers. Another example is “必须” (must) and “필수 (必須)” (required). The meaning of “필수 (必須)” (required) is much closer to the meaning of the Chinese word “必需” (required). The Chinese word of “必须” is often translated into “반드시” in Korean.

### Words With Different Forms but Basically the Same Meaning

For this group of Sino-Korean words, their corresponding Chinese words and their Chinese translation have the same meaning but different morphemes. There are many reasons for this phenomenon. From the perspective of the source of Sino-Korean words, some Sino-Korean words are from Chinese words of different periods; some are created by Koreans themselves based on Chinese characters, such as “내외 (内外)” (husband and wife). In ancient China, couples use “内人” (person inside the house) and “外子” (person working outside) for each other. So, “내외” (内外) is created. Some Sino-Korean words are borrowed from Sino-Japanese words. The difference between Sino-Japanese words and Chinese words has caused the difference between Korean and Chinese. For example, “사진 (寫真)” in Korean and “寫真” in Japanese both have the meaning of “照片” (photograph), while in Chinese, “写真” is used only for portraits or photographs of people, otherwise “照片” (photograph) is a generally used.

**Some morphemes are the same.** Some words have different forms but some of their morphemes are the same. For example, “别人” (others) and “타인 (他人)” (others) are both personal pronouns, referring to other people as opposed to “自己” (self). Both follow the structure of “modifier (别 and 他) + central word (人)”. Moreover, “他人” (others) is also a Chinese word, synonymous with “别人” (others), except “他人” (others) is more often used in written language. However, there is no Sino-Korean word corresponding to the Chinese word of “别人” (others) and the meaning of “别人” (others) is also expressed by “타인 (他人)” (others) in Korean spoken language.

**Completely different morphemes.** Words with completely different morphemes may also have the same meaning. The Chinese characters corresponding to the Korean words are often Chinese words themselves. However, due to the difference between Korean and Chinese in the meaning, these Sino-Korean words and the Chinese words with the same form can also be treated as homographs. For example, “河” (river) and “江” (river) are different in terms of usage habits in Chinese. The “亚马逊河” (Amazon River) cannot be called “亚马逊江”. “강 (江)” corresponds to the Chinese character of “江” (river), but it is synonymous with both “江” (river) and “河” (river). In the specific translation between Chinese and Korean, according to the custom, “河” (river) is often translated into “강” and “아마존강 (江)” shall be translated into “亚马逊河” (Amazon River).

**Same morphemes but in different positions in the words.** Both Korean words and Chinese words have the same morphemes but the morphemes are in reverse order in the words, which is a very complicated phenomenon. The meaning of the Sino-Korean word, which has morphemes in a reverse order compared with its corresponding Chinese word, may be the same as and may be different from its corresponding Chinese word.

These words can be further subdivided when they have basically the same meaning.

In HSK-Level 3 vocabulary, there is only one Sino-Korean word with the same morphemes as those of its corresponding Chinese word but in a reverse order. “搬运” (carry) and “운반 (運搬) 하다 (carry)” have basically the same meaning. Both words mean “moving items from one place to another”.

### **Influence of Sino-Korean Words on Chinese Learners From Korea**

#### **Positive Influence of Sino-Korean Words**

Sino-Korean Words have a large proportion in Korean words for expression of practical nouns, such as things, names, and orientations. For this part of the common nouns, the difficulty for learners is relatively small. Basically, HSK-Level 3 vocabulary words are relatively simple. From the statistical analysis above, it can be seen that in HSK-Level 3 vocabulary, words with the same form and meanings occupy a considerable proportion. Learners can understand and memorize these words with only a simple explanation. These words can be fully used to help learners quickly expand their vocabulary. This part of the vocabulary is close to the learner’s mother tongue, so they can be used to shorten the psychological distance with learners and eliminate their fear of difficulties when they, as users of phonography, begin to learn hieroglyphics

#### **Negative Influence of Sino-Korean Words**

The vocabulary differences between Sino-Korean words and modern Chinese have caused great difficulties for both Chinese learners with Korean background and Korean learners with Chinese background.

Absolute synonyms with the same form and meanings as mentioned above basically produce positive transfer. However, relative synonyms are more likely to produce negative transfer. Since these words have the same form and rational meaning, it is difficult for learners to realize their difference in terms of usage, emotions (commendatory or derogatory), and styles. It is easy for learners to make errors in using them and such errors are difficult to be corrected.

Homographs include words with the same form and partially the same meaning and words with the same form but completely different meanings as described above. Due to the same form and partially the same meaning, learners can easily remember these words, but because of some differences in usage and meaning, learners are very likely to make negative transfer. This is one of the main reasons for their vocabulary misuses in speaking, making sentences, and writing.

### **Teaching Suggestions Related to Sino-Korean Words**

#### **Using Sino-Korean Words as a Bridge to Guide Learners to Understand Chinese Characters**

Chinese characters are the basis of Chinese vocabulary and the source of some Korean words. Sino-Korean words are the core of communication between Korean and Chinese. It is possible to guide learners to learn Chinese characters through some simple correspondence between Korean words and Chinese characters in terms of the form and meaning. After learners recognize such correspondence, teachers can further explain the meaning of Chinese characters to them.

When students realize the fact that each Chinese character is a combination of sound, form, and meaning, characters can be put into words for the study of vocabulary. Although there are various differences between Chinese characters in modern Chinese and Sino-Korean words in terms of meaning and usage, making use of

Sino-Korean words can ease learners' fear of difficulty and help them to become familiar with Chinese characters and words as soon as possible. And the memory of corresponding words with the same form and meaning can effectively help them expand their vocabulary.

### **Identify Differences and Reduce Errors**

Words with the same form but different meanings have a higher error rate when used for the first time. Due to the improper grasp of the differences between Korean and Chinese in the semantic scope, mistaken replacement of words will occur when the semantic scope of Chinese words is smaller than that of Sino-Korean words and when there is an overlap in the semantic scope between the two. In teaching, learners should be aware that there are differences between Korean and Chinese. Because of the high randomness of such errors, teachers should have learners make as many sentences as possible in the teaching process so that those hidden errors can be found and corrected in time. For the Chinese words with the semantic scope wider than that of Sino-Korean words, learners are confused about their usage that cannot be found in Korean. They are not sure whether they use such words correctly. They do not dare to use such words, either. In this case, constant accumulation is required in the learning process. Teachers can summarize and discriminate common phrases and collocations for learners to learn and master.

### **Conclusion**

Lu Jianming, an expert on teaching Chinese as a foreign language, once said, "If a foreign student wants to learn Chinese well, it is important to master a large number of vocabulary words. Therefore, vocabulary teaching should be a key point" (Lu Jianming, 2000, P1-8). For Chinese learners with the Korean language background, enough attention should be given to the influence of Sino-Korean words on Chinese teaching to such learners. Making full use of Sino-Korean words can help students expand their vocabulary as soon as possible, understand, and master Chinese vocabulary well.

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