

## How Language Influences our Life and Character

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Often, we live our life without noticing that one of the key factors that influences our lives is the language that we speak on a day to day basis. Language does not only affect the verbal ability to communicate but also the thought-process itself.

Language has an impact in our life of faith, in the way we express our feelings, our beliefs about God, in how we relate with people; nearly all our daily functions have a lot to do with the language we use. Language is powerful; as the saying goes, "a single word can cause wars or peace."

### The Power of the Korean Language

I had the chance to reflect on the importance of language while living in South Korea for 4 years and studying the Korean language. I never came to realize the impact that language has on myself until I started studying a completely different language from the Albanian and English languages I was used to speaking most of my life.

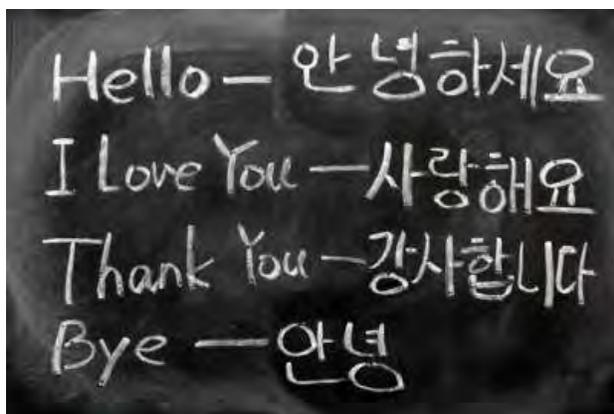
Despite the obvious fact that all languages have their respective impact in our lives, the Korean language has a specific impact on the life of faith in the unique way that it relates to the awareness of the self and how it addresses the perception of things.

### "I" am not the subject

The Subject in the Korean language omits the self in almost 95% of the grammar, which has a huge impact on how the individual is left being able to express the self.

For example, in English one would express the need for food by saying "I am hungry". In Korean, one would express this by saying "배가 고프다" (bega gopeuda) which literally means "the stomach is hungry". As we can see, the I is omitted completely and the possessive pronouns, which are usually present in the English language to associate the desires of the self, are omitted and instead, the need is addressed in an objective way separating the desires and feelings from being associated with "me" or "I". It is a language that encourages self-denial and enforces focus on the others more than the self.

### "I" am not my feelings



Another noticeable grammatical difference is the sentence structure; Korean grammar is different from the English standard Subject-Verb-Object. The Korean sentence structure is Subject-Object-Verb. Again, Korean Grammar shows how the Subject is, most of the time, omitted leaving us with a (Subject)-Object-Verb structure, with Verb being the only reference to the subject.

Why is this important? Well, on a practical level, the Korean language gives only an extremely disembodied way to express emotions which has a huge affect on the way we control the feelings we

rely on to build relationships. In English I would say "I am angry" to express my anger, thus making it personal and associating the angry emotion with the self, as in, I am negative, sad, in a bad space, etc. While in Korean the Subject "I" is omitted and anger is expressed as, "Hwa-ga Nan-da" (화가 난다), which literally translates to "anger is coming out", thus detaching the self from the feelings.

If you visit Korea you will be surprised at how easily Koreans flip their emotions. In mere seconds, Koreans can go from being angry to being calm and back to angry again. From my experience in the West, or at least in Albania, if a person got angry at someone that would last a considerable amount of time and even days. But in Korea people seem to have more control over emotions since most of the time the emotions expressed are not considered personal. Instead, something that is happening rather than someone associated with it.

## **For the Sake of the Whole**

These abilities contribute to the Korean group living culture that is opposite from the individualistic culture we usually experience in western countries. In the west if you feel differently toward something that the group cares about, it's easy to follow your own direction. However, in Korea personal feelings are more easily discarded for the sake of the whole or community.

The emphasis on self-denial in the Korean language itself encourages self-denial in daily practice. This matches well with the discipline and training of living a life for the sake of others, which many religions teach.

## **Language creates character and culture**



Language is certainly a part of the national identity we share and makes us feel part of a community. It is part of the national character in a country as well, and one of the key factors that distinguishes the Korean people from other cultures. You can't understand someone deeply unless you talk the same language. I came to understand more about the Korean people's way of thinking when I started to speak their language, thus thinking in their language. Noticing the impact that the Korean language had on me helped me become more aware not just about my own language, Albanian, or even

the English language, but the implications it has on character development.

Learning other languages is an essential step in building better relationships based on mutual understanding, as well as discovering a set of different character traits. Learning a language completely opposite to the one we speak daily can help us break free from national cultural barriers. If you want to challenge your way of thinking and are ready to learn a new language the Korean language will be challenging to learn, but a worthwhile endeavor as you will certainly discover a new part of yourself.