

THE EVOLUTION OF THE KOREAN LANGUAGE UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND INTERNET CULTURE

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Annotation. This article examines the evolution of the Korean language under the influence of social media and internet culture. It explores how digital communication platforms have facilitated the emergence of new slang, abbreviations, and linguistic trends. The impact of English loanwords, Konglish expressions, and the increasing informalization of language are discussed in detail. Additionally, the article highlights the role of hashtags, viral expressions, and the potential future developments of the Korean language in the digital age. By analyzing these trends, the study provides insight into how modern technology continues to reshape linguistic practices in Korea.

Keywords: Korean language, social media, internet culture, digital communication, slang, abbreviations, Konglish, hashtags, linguistic evolution, informalization.

The Korean language has undergone significant transformations over the past few decades, driven in part by the rapid advancement of technology and the proliferation of social media. With the rise of platforms such as KakaoTalk, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube, internet culture has played a crucial role in shaping modern Korean linguistic trends. This article explores the various ways in which social media and digital communication have influenced the evolution of the Korean language, from the development of new slang and abbreviations to the increasing integration of foreign words and changes in linguistic etiquette.

The Emergence of New Vocabulary and Slang. One of the most noticeable impacts of social media on the Korean language is the creation and widespread adoption of new slang terms and abbreviations. Many of these expressions are born from the need to communicate more efficiently in digital spaces. Korean netizens (internet users) often develop and popularize new words that quickly spread through online communities, chat applications, and social media platforms. These words often encapsulate contemporary cultural phenomena, humor, and the emotions of young users. Some prominent examples include:

1. 에르 (er): A shortened form of "error," used to describe awkward or cringeworthy situations.

2. 따라하면 (ttarahamyeon): Meaning "if you follow," often used when discussing trends.

3. 불홀 (bulhol): A contraction of "불가능한 홀로" (impossible solo), referring to tasks that are difficult to do alone.

4. 신속통 (shinsoktong): A term describing the frustration of waiting for a slow internet connection.

5. 아직 (ajik): A commonly used word for "yet," but also widely used in memes and internet humor to express impatience.

These slang terms often emerge from younger internet users and spread rapidly across social media, becoming embedded in everyday speech. As technology evolves, so too does this lexicon, leading to a dynamic and ever-changing linguistic landscape.

Abbreviation and Simplification. Social media users frequently rely on abbreviations to save time when typing. Korean, a language already rich in contractions, has seen an increase in shortened phrases and acronyms. Common examples include:

1. ㅋㅋ (kkk) and ㅎㅎ (hhh): Representing laughter, similar to "LOL."
2. ㅇㅇ (ㅇㅇ, "eung eung"): A casual way to say "yes" in text form.
3. ㅎㅎ (hi): A shortened form of "안녕하세요" (hello).
4. ㅂㅂ (bb): Short for "bye-bye."
5. ㄱㄱ (gg): Short for "go-go," meaning "let's go."

This trend reflects the growing emphasis on speed and efficiency in digital communication. These abbreviations are not limited to casual conversations but also appear in online advertisements, memes, and marketing campaigns. The simplification of communication allows users to quickly interact with each other, making online dialogue more dynamic and interactive.

The Influence of English and Other Languages. The increasing exposure to global media has led to an influx of English loanwords and hybrid expressions into Korean social media discourse. Words such as "selfie" (셀카, selka) and "influencer" (인플루언서, inpeullueonseo) have become commonplace. Additionally, Konglish (a blend of Korean and English) is frequently used, especially among younger generations.

Moreover, internet culture has fostered the use of Romanized Korean and mixed-language sentences, making communication more flexible and globally accessible. Korean social media users frequently use English words or phrases in their posts to appear trendy, sophisticated, or humorous. Some common examples include:

1. 컴백 (keom-baek, "comeback"): Used widely in K-pop culture to describe an artist's return with a new album or single.

2. 헬스 (hel-seu, "health"): Refers to the gym or fitness culture.

3. 스킨십 (seu-kin-ship, "skinship"): A Konglish term referring to physical affection, such as hugging or holding hands.

This hybridization of Korean and foreign languages reflects the interconnectedness of global pop culture and digital communities.

The Rise of Hashtags and Trendy Expressions. Hashtags have become an essential feature of Korean social media. Popular hashtags often reflect current events, memes, or social movements, influencing the way people express themselves online. For example, phrases like #먹스타그램 (meokseutageuraem, "foodstagram") and #OOTD (Outfit of the Day) showcase how digital culture shapes language use.

Additionally, new expressions frequently emerge from viral content, whether from K-pop idols, streamers, or online communities. These catchphrases often gain momentum through retweets, memes, and video clips, eventually becoming part of everyday conversations. Online users also invent phrases that quickly spread and dominate digital discussions. This rapid evolution of expressions illustrates how social media fosters creativity and collective participation in shaping language trends.

The Impact on Formal vs. Informal Language. Social media has blurred the boundaries between formal and informal speech in Korean. Traditionally, Korean has a strict system of honorifics and politeness levels, but the casual nature of online communication has led to a shift toward more informal speech. Younger users, in particular, are more likely to use 반말 (banmal, casual speech) even in online interactions with strangers.

However, this linguistic shift has also sparked debates about language etiquette, as some worry that the erosion of formal speech might lead to a decline in traditional respect-based communication. While casual speech dominates online discourse, there are still instances where users adhere to honorifics, especially when addressing elders or in professional settings.

The Future of Korean Language in the Digital Age. As technology continues to evolve, so too will the Korean language. The integration of AI, machine learning, and voice recognition into digital platforms is likely to introduce new linguistic adaptations. Additionally, the growing influence of K-pop and Hallyu (Korean Wave) may contribute to the further global spread of Korean internet slang.

As younger generations continue to shape digital communication, we can expect even more linguistic innovation. Whether through new meme-inspired phrases, AI-driven chatbots, or evolving texting conventions, the Korean language will continue to adapt to the needs of its users.

Conclusion

The influence of social media and internet culture on the Korean language is undeniable. From the creation of new slang to the integration of English expressions and abbreviations, digital platforms have significantly reshaped communication in

Korea. The speed of linguistic evolution in online spaces highlights the dynamic nature of the language and its responsiveness to technological and cultural changes. As the digital world continues to expand, the Korean language will evolve alongside it, preserving its identity while embracing modern innovations.

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