

## Quick facts about Korea and the Korean language

Korean is spoken by nearly 80,000,000 people worldwide.

About 49,000,000 of them live in South Korea, another 23,000,000 in North Korea. Several regional dialects are spoken within the Korean peninsula, but they are mutually understandable.

About 2,000,000 people in China and significant populations in the United States, Japan, Uzbekistan, Russia and Kazakhstan also speak Korean as their first language. Many additional thousands of Korean speakers are concentrated in Saudi Arabia, Canada, Kyrgyzstan, Germany, Tajikistan, Paraguay, Singapore and Turkmenistan.

According to Internet World Stats, Korean is now seventh among the top ten languages used on the world wide web, with almost 40,000,000 users.

In South Korea, about 34,000,000 of those 49,000,000 Korean speakers are internet users. The country has about 26,000,000 main telephone lines and 36,000,000 mobile (cell) phones.

### Hangul

The Korean language was originally written with Chinese characters, but fifteenth-century Korean king Sejong the Great commissioned the invention of a system of writing based on the position of the human mouth as the various sounds are formed. The new script was first published in 1446 in a document entitled "The Proper Sounds for the Education of the People."

Like Japanese and Chinese, Korean has been (and still can be) written vertically, right to left, but is now more commonly written horizontally, left to right.

| Vowels     |   | ㅏ    | ㅑ  | ㅓ | ㅕ   | ㅗ | ㅛ  | ㅜ | ㅠ  | ㅡ  | ㅣ |   |
|------------|---|------|----|---|-----|---|----|---|----|----|---|---|
|            |   | a    | ya | o | yeo | o | yo | u | yu | eu | i |   |
| Consonants | ㄱ | g(k) | 가  | 갸 | 거   | 겨 | 고  | 교 | 구  | 규  | 그 | 기 |
|            | ㄴ | n    | 나  | 냐 | 너   | 녀 | 노  | 뇨 | 누  | 뉴  | 느 | 니 |
|            | ㄷ | d    | 다  | 댜 | 더   | 더 | 도  | 됴 | 두  | 듀  | 드 | 디 |
|            | ㄹ | r(l) | 라  | 랴 | 러   | 려 | 로  | 료 | 루  | 류  | 르 | 리 |
|            | ㅁ | m    | 마  | 먜 | 머   | 며 | 모  | 묘 | 무  | 뮤  | 므 | 미 |
|            | ㅂ | b    | 바  | 뵤 | 버   | 벼 | 보  | 뵤 | 부  | 뷰  | 브 | 비 |
|            | ㅅ | s    | 사  | 샤 | 서   | 셔 | 소  | 쇼 | 수  | 슈  | 스 | 시 |
|            | ㅇ | ∅    | 아  | 야 | 어   | 여 | 오  | 요 | 우  | 유  | 으 | 이 |
|            | ㅈ | j    | 자  | 쟸 | 저   | 져 | 조  | 죠 | 주  | 쥬  | 즈 | 지 |
|            | ㅊ | ch   | 차  | 챤 | 쳐   | 쳐 | 초  | 쵸 | 추  | 츬  | 츠 | 치 |
|            | ㅋ | k    | 카  | 카 | 커   | 켜 | 코  | 교 | 쿠  | 큐  | 크 | 키 |
|            | ㅌ | t    | 타  | 타 | 터   | 터 | 토  | 토 | 투  | 튜  | 트 | 티 |
|            | ㅍ | p    | 파  | 파 | 퍼   | 퍼 | 포  | 표 | 푸  | 퓨  | 프 | 피 |
| ㅎ          | h | 하    | 하  | 허 | 허   | 호 | 효  | 후 | 휴  | 흐  | 히 |   |

# Managing Korean language projects

Sean Lee

**I** “I don’t speak Chinese, Japanese or Korean.” But those languages might be frequent demands as your localization language pairs. Of the 92 responses to the 2005 annual survey that our firm performed with our language service provider (LSP) clients last year, an average 42% of their translation projects was for Asian languages. Many LSPs supply Chinese, Japanese and Korean translation even though the project managers themselves are not Asian linguists. Many linguistic matters will be covered by their private translators or by language partners, but some basic knowledge would help establish guidelines to manage the translation projects for those languages. Some practical tips are discussed here.

|           | South Korean    | North Korean |
|-----------|-----------------|--------------|
| Computer  | 컴퓨터             | 콤퓨터          |
| Germany   | 독일              | 도이쵸란드        |
| Software  | 소프트웨어           | 쏘프트웨어        |
| Feedback  | 피드백 or 의견       | 런제           |
| Home page | 홈페이지            | 첫 페이지        |
| FAQ       | FAQ or 자주 묻는 질문 | 문답집          |
| Enemy     | 원수              | 원췌           |

North Koreans and South Koreans use different word choices, grammar and style.

will be Korean-speaking residents in North America. I recall some clients who had a request for localization into Korean for North Korea, which is quite different from Korean used by South Koreans in word choice, grammar and style. Communication, though, would not be difficult.

Language in the two markets – ROK and North America – does not vary by much, but some terms might be different. Many terms tend to be transliterated or phonetically translated for the North American market instead of using native Korean words. As an example, *parking lot* can be done differently in the two ways mentioned. The transliteration of those words will be considered as a bad or even wrong translation, however, at least in

|             | Korean for Korean residents (as a written translation) – example A | Korean for US residents (as a written translation) – example B |
|-------------|--|--|
| Parking lot | 주차장  | 주차장, 파킹랏, or 파킹장 are all allowed.                              |

These translations will work in South Korea and the US, but not in North Korea.

written expression, if the target market is ROK.

Another topic that frequently comes up is the need to know Chinese language variations. Spoken Chinese has dozens of different dialects. Mandarin and Cantonese are the two most widely spoken of those dialects. In the category of the written languages, you need to decide whether Traditional Chinese (TC) or Simplified Chinese (SC) is to be used.

Is there a way to distinguish between the two written forms of Chinese if you are only a monolingual English speaker? Yes – if the text is a sentence that has a period. In SC, a sentence ends with a period positioned at the bottom; in TC, a

## What should be decided first?

Many questions are raised when one receives a localization request from a client. The target audience will be one of the most important things that should be considered in the project planning. If the language is Korean, the biggest market will be South Korea or the Republic of Korea (ROK) and the next biggest



Sean Lee is vice president of production at 1-Stop Translations USA, L.L.C.

**Company X Co. Ltd.**

John Frank  
 Certified Engineer  
 Allworld Institute of Software Engineering  
 CEO English

**Company X Co. Ltd.**

John Frank  
 Certified Engineer  
 Allworld Institute of Software Engineering  
 CEO Chinese

**Company X Co. Ltd.**

CEO  
 Certified Engineer  
 Allworld Institute of Software Engineering  
 John Frank Japanese

**Company X Co. Ltd.**

CEO John Frank  
 Certified Engineer  
 Allworld Institute of Software Engineering  
Korean

Business cards require different construction for different cultures.

sentence ends with a period positioned in the middle vertically. But there is definitely no way to identify different spoken language styles in writing unless you have knowledge of the Chinese language.

People in Hong Kong and Taiwan and many US immigrants use TC as their way of writing Chinese. If, for example, we have a marketing brochure which needs TC for the Hong Kong market, the mar-

keting material will be created for its impact for that particular audience, and not just for transferring information. Tone and style will be affected by the spoken language. In this situation, you will have to consider another option – the colloquial style of Cantonese.

A project manager may decide to convert SC text to TC if the project goes into multiple languages including SC and TC. Experience shows that whether one is using a translation tool or a human translator's assistance, simple conversion between SC and TC may cause problems. The terminology, style and tone can be different or even totally inappropriate.

Business card translation, for example, is not as simple as the amount of text on a small card. Although the rules are not strict, the order of placing names and titles will need to differ from the English as shown in the accompanying illustrations.

Translation of the job title can change depending on whether the client's company is a nonprofit organization or not. For example, the Korean or Japanese translation of *director* for a nonprofit organization might be totally wrong if it is actually a for-profit company. For this reason, the nature of the company should be referred to. You probably will understand the serious nature of the problem when a client calls, saying that the business cards have been printed and that he or she has found an incorrect translation in the text.

### What affects workload estimation?

If the direction of translation is into English from Asian languages, you may want to get the rate of source language unit based on your rate per English word, or to see how big the text will be after translation in English words for scheduling purposes (because you have already your

own metrics for a translator's productivity, for example, 2,000 English words per day). Depending on the language, the volume expansion varies, as shown in the accompanying table.

For Japanese, the expansion rate can be quite different if the content contains many katakana (Japanese alphabet used for writing foreign words) words instead of native Japanese words, or expanded hiragana expressions instead of the kanji way (the Japanese term referring to Chinese characters), which is more condensed and space-effective. If the content is IT-related or a software manual, the localized text still will have many English words, so this will make a difference in your estimate.

| One Asian character input | Average English output in words |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Chinese                   | 0.51                            |
| Japanese                  | 0.44                            |
| Korean                    | 0.46                            |

Among the three languages, Korean has its own important spacing rules, while you don't see much spacing in Chinese and Japanese. Korean spacing rules are more complex than those of English and allow many variations. So, **estimating** the target English result by using Korean words is less accurate than using Korean characters.

### What causes delay in delivery of CJK projects?

Sometimes, when you are about to publish a localized brochure, and the brochure is in QuarkXPress format, you can't even open the files – or, after opening the files, the text isn't displayed correctly because the Asian fonts that were used to create it are missing. Most desktop publishing (DTP) service suppliers do not provide the Asian fonts that were used in the localized material because of copyright issues. Even if you are given the required fonts, you don't want to risk opening the text-intact QuarkXPress files and adjusting them. This is normally done by Asian DTP specialists. All typesetting work is performed using each Asian language version, and they make all text converted to vector images in the EPS format – which, because it is a graphic format, allows printing without fonts and the problems caused by fonts, and also allows as good a resolution as when you use fonts. And they put the converted images in the original English

### Some notes about linguistic aspects of Korean

- At the start of a letter, it's meaningless to distinguish *Mr.* or *Mrs.* as in *Dear Mr. (or Mrs.) Lee*. It doesn't have to be translated separately to be inserted in the letter.
- No difference is made between a single and a plural form in most cases. Many of our English software user-interface-extracted sources put them as different items, but that resulted in the same translation.
- Korean sentences should have one space after a full stop. I see many of our clients remove this space after running TRADOS-command "Clean Up" mistakenly while doing the TM management on their side of a project.
- The sentence structure of Korean differs from that of English. A Korean sentence starts with the subject and ends with a verb. This needs to be considered when putting a delimiter in source software strings for Korean translation.

QuarkXPress source files. This way, you will still have to rely on your DTP vendors for any future revision.

With the nature of technical manuals – frequent updating and many cross-references within the manual – Adobe FrameMaker is one of the popular applications that many manual authors adopt. Most lengthy manuals or user guides have their indexes at the back. The localization of those books should contain the index pages where all translated index keywords are correctly sorted in the target-language order. For management convenience in the translation industry, that file format is usually converted to another format such as RTF. The RTF format will reveal all index keywords in line together with other corresponding body text. Later on, those keywords will be collected and placed in

the index page. As I mentioned earlier, Japanese translation can be done in either hiragana or kanji for some portion of the phrases. Experience has taught me that English FrameMaker, which many LSPs use, does not sort out the Japanese translation written in kanji correctly. So, translators should be instructed to add pronunciation in hiragana or katakana with some special tags next to the kanji index words, or else the order will be messed up whenever the manual is updated automatically. Some LSPs may have their own technologies to solve this issue, but you will need to be aware of this issue.

### Character size

A CJK character looks a little bit bigger than an English character of the same point size. This will affect the layout of

### References

General project management:

[www.pmi.org/info/pp\\_pmbok2000welcome.asp](http://www.pmi.org/info/pp_pmbok2000welcome.asp)

Romanization for CJK:

[www.library.yale.edu/eastasian/romanization.html](http://www.library.yale.edu/eastasian/romanization.html)

[www.loc.gov/catdir/pinyin/romcover.html](http://www.loc.gov/catdir/pinyin/romcover.html)

[www.hangul.or.kr/M4-4.htm](http://www.hangul.or.kr/M4-4.htm)

Conversion tool for Korean Romanization (in Korean):

[www.mct.go.kr/open\\_content/administrative/news/notice\\_view.jsp](http://www.mct.go.kr/open_content/administrative/news/notice_view.jsp)

CJK and DTP of the QuarkXPress format:

[www.quark.com/service/desktop/support/techinfo/view.jsp?faq\\_id=210](http://www.quark.com/service/desktop/support/techinfo/view.jsp?faq_id=210)

Samples of online localization style guides for CJK:

SC: [http://developer.gnome.org/projects/gtp/style-guides/pdf/styleguide-zh\\_CN.pdf](http://developer.gnome.org/projects/gtp/style-guides/pdf/styleguide-zh_CN.pdf)

KO: <http://developer.gnome.org/projects/gtp/style-guides/pdf/styleguide-ko.pdf>

JP (in Japanese): <http://developer.gnome.org/projects/gtp/style-guides/pdf/styleguide-ja.pdf>

More electronic resources for CJK:

<http://wason.library.cornell.edu/e-course>



1-STOP translation  
for promotional use only



1-STOP translation  
for promotional use only

the localized material. And in the assigned area for one character, one character of those Asian languages has many more strokes than an English character does. The illustration shows, from left to right: English, Chinese, Japanese (kanji) and Korean.



I was involved in a localization project of an international company website that went into ten different languages. The original website was built in English, and it was about to go international for a product promotion. The English website was beautiful, and it was well-designed enough to imply the quality of the product and to distinguish it from the similar product lines of their competitors. But when it was localized into those Asian languages, the localized sites were not as good as the original. Regardless of the translation quality, the appearance that resulted from putting

the translation within the layout restrictions of the website was bad. Much of the type in buttons and menus in the original was 8 points, which was proper for English. With that size, the Asian translation looks gritty, coarse or simply inferior, whatever it means. Where the translation should have had bold face, some of the text was even illegible. So, the design of the website should have been adjusted delicately.

### Is your client's brand name proper in the target country?

A home appliance company in Japan recently ran an ad on television to promote its new electric cooker to Korean television channels. When I heard the brand name in the ad, I doubted it would attract consumers because the pronunciation of the name evoked a sexual joke that went around the internet a few years ago. The name seemed to have been translated phonetically. The company would have fared better if the name had been evaluated before it was used

in the target market. This is beyond a simple translation matter. Some brand names, company names, or website URLs can be found to have a negative connotation and to evoke a strong negative response.

### Romanization and phonetic translation

Romanization refers to the phonetic representation of non-Roman language material in the Roman alphabet. As long as we communicate in different languages, there is always a need to use romanization. Systematic Chinese romanization was started in the seventeenth century by missionaries, and it has evolved into the standard Pin Yin spelling system. Three systems are used for Japanese: Hepburn Romanization, Kunrei-shiki and Nihon-shiki. Variants of Hepburn are the most widely used. In contrast, there are three Romanization rules for Korean: Revised Romanization of Korean, McCune-Reischauer and Yale Romanization. Of the three, Revised Romanization of Korean is the latest, approved in 2000 and now officially used by South Korea. Any Korean document such as a birth certificate or a family register that is to be translated into English needs to follow this rule, even though it allows some exceptions for personal names and for company or organization names.

Not all sounds that can be made in a language have a corresponding character in that mother tongue to represent the same or the equivalent (agreed even though it's different) sound in another language. And one character can have multiple phonemes. So, romanization rules have been changing and have been invented differently to be more effective (but some may say the latest version is not always so). As an example, the [ʃ] or [v] sound exists in a Korean's daily life – those phonemes can be pronounced – but no actual Korean characters have those same sounds. Likewise, English has no corresponding characters for such kinds of missing sounds in other Asian languages.

Many of the topics and approaches that result in successful project management for East Asian language projects are similar to those for other Western language projects. But by considering issues such as those mentioned in this article, a project manager can develop some useful guidelines for working with those Asian languages. The list of references on the previous page provides further examples and approaches. **M**

**1-STOP translation**  
**for promotional use only**