

‘I’ and ‘We’ in Russian and Korean *

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Russian is an Eastern Slavic language belonging to the Indo-European family, and has much more in common with, say, German, French or English than with Korean. There are no direct historical connections between the Russian and Korean languages whatsoever. A comparative analysis of these languages, therefore, can only be typological in nature.

Modernization of Russia started much earlier than in Korea, namely, from the second half of the seventeenth to the beginning of the eighteenth century. During the late formation of the Russian language, however, Russian society, except for a thin social layer of aristocracy, remained a traditional one. That is perhaps why the Russian language, while genealogically akin to Western European languages, has some features that bear some resemblance to the Korean language.

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Personal and possessive pronouns, being the most common words in every language, are particularly characteristic of the way people express their attitude toward each other in every culture. Indicating the 'person' and 'number' of the interlocutor, personal pronouns formulate the relations between people in discourse in a direct and effective way. The usage of personal pronouns reveals what is characteristic of people's attitude towards other people, and towards various aspects of life. Martin Luther, leader of the German Religious Reformation, said that the heart of religion lies in its personal pronouns. This is true in general, aside from religious contexts.

1

The first and second person pronouns in many languages carry a special grammatical meaning which in morphology is usually called "a grammar of politeness." A well-known contemporary Russian morphologist pointed out that

Politeness is one of the most wide-spread categories expressed in a system of personal pronouns. There are numerous systems of pronouns in which politeness is the only semantically distinctive feature (besides 'person,' of course), as can be noticed in many Austronesian and Austro-Asiatic languages; while generally the total number of oppositions may be very large, and the differences between them very refined. (For instance, in the Austronesian language Acheh, neither the second, nor the third person pronouns distinguish between singular and plural numbers, while distinguishing among degrees of politeness)." (Plugian 2000:258)

It is rather surprising in this respect that English does not manifest politeness in personal pronouns. For, as Plugian (2000:259) points out,

the majority of languages exhibit at least two degrees of politeness: informality, when social equality obtains between the speaker and the addressee, and politeness, when the addressee is hierarchically higher than the speaker, or when the addressee's position is unknown. The well-known usage of *duzen* vs *siezen* in German, or *tutoyer* vs *vouvoiyer* in French, may pass here as a good case in point.

The Russian first person pronouns are typologically similar to their Western-European counterparts, and most of all to those of French. This phenomenon has its roots in history. Since the Russian nobility during part of the eighteenth and almost the whole of the nineteenth centuries were bilingual (in a higher society it was common to speak not so much Russian but French), the French language exerted some influence on the final formation of Russian forms of politeness usage.

Russian second person pronouns even phonetically appear to resemble the French ones. An informal version of the singular 'ты' (*ty*) – equivalent to French *tu* – coexists in Russian discourse with the singular polite form 'вы,' which coincides with the plural "вы" (as is the case with the French *vous*). What difference there is in the pronominal systems of the two languages has to do with declension: in Russian each pronoun has six cases while French pronouns are not declined and have only two forms: *tonique* and *atone*.

The Russian language is 'synthetic.' The forms of a word are made by adding prefixes, suffixes and endings. However, sometimes the root of the word has to be changed as well. The Russian writer Vladimir Nabokov, a Nobel prize laureate, who emigrated to France after the Russian Revolution and later taught Russian literature at Cornwall University (USA), once wrote on the subject: "You will feel mentally stiff and bruised after your first declension of personal pronouns. I see,

however, no other way of getting to Gogol, or any other Russian writer for that matter” (1986:111).

The rather complicated declension of Russian first person pronouns can be shown in the following table:

	Singular	Plural
Nominative	я (ya, ‘I’)	Мы (my, ‘we’)
Genitive	Меня (menia, ‘of me’)	Нас (nas, ‘of us’)
Dative	Мне (mnie, ‘to me’)	Нам (nam, ‘to us’)
Accusative	Меня (menia, ‘me’)	Нас (nas, ‘us’)
Instrumental	Мной (мноу, ‘by/with me’)	Нами (nami, ‘by/with us’)
Prepositional	Обо/во мне (obo/vo mnie, ‘about/in me’)	О/в нас (o/v nas, ‘about /in us’)

Each of the possessive pronouns—the first person singular мой (‘my’) and the first person plural наш (‘our’)—also has six different forms.

Korean personal pronouns are unique in a way. The pronouns are embedded with different levels of honorific forms, which are discriminately used depending upon the seniority of the person involved. There are three levels of honorific forms in pronouns: self-effacing, plain and honorific. The system of forms of Korean personal pronouns discussed in some Korean grammars can be summarized into the following table (Ihm, Hong and Chang 1981:45):¹⁾

1) The particles 이/가, 은/는 with which these pronouns are usually used are omitted in this table.

<u>Person</u>	<u>Level</u>	<u>Singular</u>	<u>Plural</u>
First Person	Plain (평칭)	나/내	우리
	Self-effacing (겸칭)	저/제	
Second Person	Plain (평칭)	너/네	너희들
	Honorific (존칭)	선생	선생들
Third Person	Plain (평칭)	이/그/저 사람	이/그/저 사람들
	Honorific (존칭)	이/그/저분	이/그/저 분들

This table does not pretend to be comprehensive or perfectly precise. In the second person, for example, the following forms are used in addition to the ones mentioned above.

Second Person	Plain (평칭)	당신	당신들 여러분(들) 자네(들)
	Honorific (존칭)	댁 그대	

Of the two honorific forms just given, the first one (댁) sounds a little old-fashioned and loses its honorific force in some context, while the second one (그대) is hardly used outside a literary context, being appropriate only for poetry, songs, and the like. As for the forms 당신 and 자네, they have rather a special usage nowadays, as we shall see later.

The other forms of these pronouns corresponding to Russian forms of oblique cases are usually formed in the Korean language by means of particles: 을/를, 에게/한테, 에게서/한테서, etc.

2

In contemporary comparative morphology, Korean is often referred to as belonging to a group of languages which exhibits a wider degree of politeness. “For example,” Plugian (2000:259) observes, “the social distance between the speaker and the listener, or the speaker’s relative hierarchical position as to the listener, can be expressed.” More specifically, the number of honorific and self-effacing forms is probably much greater in Korean than in any other languages—at least five or six.²⁾ But they are expressed mainly by verb endings, suffixes, vocabulary, and only secondarily by personal pronouns and forms of addressing. A special feature of the first person which differentiates it from the second and the third persons, consists of only two levels of speech: plain and self-effacing. Since in the first person people speak of themselves, honorific forms do not seem quite appropriate.

As for Korean possessive pronouns, they are much easier to learn than Russian ones. They simply involve addition of the suffix ‘의’ to personal pronouns. But in spoken Korean, some possessives do not even require addition of ‘의,’ their forms coinciding (or almost coincide) with the ‘stem’ forms: 우리가(мы)-우리(наш), 내가(я)-내(мой), 제가(я)-제(мой).

Some linguists say that in Korean there is no plural. This is not

2) They often enumerate even more, at least nine of them: “The grammatical form of the verb also reflects the speaker’s relationship both to those addressed and those who are spoken about, using agglutinative syllables to express at least nine degrees of respect or familiarity” (Pratt & Rutt 1999:266). Usually the following degrees of Korean speech are clearly distinguished: “1) polite/formal 2) polite/informal, 3) authoritarian, 4) unceremonious, 5) intimate, and 6) ordinary (Verkholak & Kaplan 1997, 33)”

exactly true because we do find the plural marker ‘들,’ as in 사람들 (‘people’), although in many cases the addition of this plural suffix results in an awkward, studied, expression. The same suffix is used for formation of plural in pronouns. Interestingly enough, this suffix can be affixed not only to nouns and pronouns but also to verbs and adverbs: 걱정하지들/걱정들 하지 마세요 (‘Don’t you people worry’), 빨리들 합시다 (‘Let us do it quickly’). So it is obvious that a grammatical meaning which is conveyed by this suffix is not just that of plural but of collectivity as well. The phrase ‘We Koreans,’ which is often used to emphasize the national identity of the Korean people, is 우리 한국사람은. This may be literally rendered ‘We, Korean man.’³⁾ And this in a way reflects a special sense of unity or solidarity felt among Korean people.

This phenomenon has much influence on the way Koreans speak foreign languages. For a Russian phrase like ‘During vacations I will read books’ the beginning-level students tend to say ‘During vacation I will read a *book*.’ Strictly speaking we cannot say that in Korean there is no plural. It would be more appropriate to say that the category of ‘number’ does not exist in Korean grammar, or, rephrasing Edward Sapir, that Korean, unlike the Indo-European languages, “is not sensitive towards the singular-plural distinction” (2001:601). In fact, there are explicit statements to this effect: “in Korean there is generally no distinction between the singular and the plural” (De Mente 1998:125), “in Korean language a stem of a noun does not

3) Another version of this expression, 우리 한국사람들은 (with a word 사람들 ‘people’ in a form of plural), is also a possibility, but the singular version is very characteristic of Korean and not possible neither in Russian nor in any Western European languages.

express neither singularity, nor plurality” (Verkholak & Kaplan 1997: 90).

Maybe this is related not to the fact that plurality is not conceptualized in the language but rather to the fact that singularity is not expressed in any grammatically significant way in this language. “If vagueness of meaning remains present,” E. Sapir (ibid.) wrote, “it is either necessary or not essential.” In our case, the first conjunct of this statement seems applicable. Apparently, the collective way of life of the Korean people did not demand making number a separate grammatical category. It had given a special functional semantics to the use of personal pronouns.

According to De Mente (1998:21), “[t]he demands of the ‘collective character’ of individuals eventually became so strong that the personal pronoun *I* was seldom used. Koreans typically thought and spoke in terms of *we*, not *I*.” In Western culture the concept of personal individuality was introduced very early. Social life in the West generally has always had a more individual, sometimes even too individual, pattern. Perhaps this is why in Western languages singular personal and possessive pronouns are predominant. Whereas speakers of English would say: *my* house, *my* family, and *my* country, Koreans would say *our* house, *our* family, and *our* country. The biggest dictionary of Korean language is called: 우리 말 큰 사전 (‘The Grand Dictionary of *Our* Language’). The Korean would call their compatriots 우리 나라 사람들 (‘our country people’) where the British and the Americans would say “*my* compatriots.”

Imagine a conversation situation in which a wife refers to her husband as ‘our husband’—a situation absolutely impossible in Western societies, including Russian. But this is exactly what happens

in Korean speech contexts, and it is not because Korean wives readily share their husbands. Nor is it because they think about their husbands in the light of *pater familias*, which by the way takes place sometimes in Russian discourse as is suggested by the expression *наш папа* ('our daddy') used in conversation between mother and her children. Koreans tend to avoid using a singular possessive pronoun which sounds too individualistic and thus immodest. But perhaps, this is rather a figure of conversational etiquette than a feature of national mentality.

"Until recent times," De Mente (op. cit., 125) observes, "the word *I* was uncommon in Korean speech, and it is still much less used than in most other societies" and that "*I* and *we* are often used interchangeably." The state of affairs outlined above suggests that there is some truth to this statement. But upon closer scrutiny this is a bit of an exaggeration: there are also no dearth of cases when Korean *I* and *we*, *my* and *our* cannot be used interchangeably. In contemporary Korean speech, first person pronouns *저* and *나*, and their possessive forms *저* and *내* are often used absolutely independently, without any relevance to corresponding plural pronouns. In monologues of contemporary Korean dramas, the first person pronoun in the form '나' is often put in an initial emphasized position with a pause after it.

Generally speaking, plural pronouns are used more often in Korean than in Western European languages, and in this respect, the Russian language seems to stand somewhere in between. In comparison with Koreans, Russians tend to use the first person singular more often than the plural. In all examples given above the Russian people say "мой/моя /моё/мои" ('my'). Russian possessive pronouns have a gender and a number. In the well-known patriotic song of Stalin's times, the first line

goes:

Широка страна моя родная.
(Large is *my* native country.)

Russian dictionaries are titled the same way as Western ones. And no Russian woman would ever say *наш муж* ('*our* husband') But, compared to Western languages, the plural expression is also a possibility in Russian, as can be noticed from phrases like *наша страна* ('our country'), *наша семья* ('our family'), and *наша дом* ('our house') —striking analogues of the Korean expressions mentioned above. Russians also refer to their compatriots as *наши* (literally '*ours*,' meaning '*our* people'). The Russian teacher in a class for foreign students may well say *мы так не говорим* ('we dont say that'), meaning "we Russians don't" In such a situation, the British and Americans may as well use the third person pronoun ('they don't say so in English') as the first person plural. They even tend to use a second person singular to address an undefined person: 'You don't say so in English.'

One can easily notice that the Russian pronoun of the first person singular *я* (*ya*) is used more rarely than in Western European languages. Russians as well as Koreans use the first person plural more often, or avoid using the first person pronoun altogether. The Russian language implies more collectivism than Western Indo-European languages. Speaking too much about yourself, and using the first person singular too frequently is generally considered immodest. Russians, as well as Koreans, write the first person singular with a small, not a capital letter, unlike English.⁴⁾ There is even a Russian

proverb which says: *Я последняя буква в алфавите* ('I is the last letter in the alphabet'), which is perfectly true as far as the Russian alphabet is concerned. This may be considered to be similar to the self-effacing forms of the first person singular in Korean, *저는/제가*.

Russian, like Korean, is rather a 'be' language than a 'have' one. So Korean expression like *내게는 형이 있습니다* ('I have a brother') will be rendered in Russian as *У меня есть брат* ('to me there is a brother'), a far cry from the English equivalent, 'I have a brother.' In this type of construction in Russian, as in Korean, the first person singular is not in the nominative but oblique case, genitive in Russian, and dative in Korean) cases. This fact also contributes to a more narrow usage of the first person singular nominative: *я* ('I').

3

The predominance of *we* over *I* in Russian has something to do with the Russian commune and the ecclesiastical and spiritual concept of *соборность* ('conciliarism'). Russian peasants, even before the Revolution, lived in a commune (*община*), a patriarchal, collective form of organizing peasants' lives and agricultural activity. The idea of preference for doing things together is quite distinctive in Russian proverbs, such as "One man is not a warrior in a battle" and "Even death is more fun when there are people around."

The concept of conciliarism (*соборность*) derives from the verb "to conciliate," which means to reconcile or to effect reconciliation, to win

4) On the contrary, when trying to be formally polite, Russians sometimes write the second person singular "вы" with a capital 'В.'

someone's trust or someone's love. It signifies the spiritual unity of the people, which was supposed to exist within Russian society. The latter was led by the Tsar, who was considered not only authoritarian, but, also a spiritual leader of Russia. Speaking about himself in his manifestos to the Russian people, the Tsar did not start with "I," but with "We," with a capital first letter. "We, *Nicolas the Second*..." Even the last Russian Tsar in the twentieth century still used this formula signifying that what he said and did was not his own but the whole Russian people's will.

The spiritual path of the main characters in Leo Tolstoy's novels *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina* is, to some extent, a development from individualism to a conciliatory and internal unity with others, particularly with common people. It is worth mentioning that the second word in the title *War and Peace* (Война и мир) was written by Tolstoy himself, not as 'мир' but as 'миp' with a letter 'i.' This letter was eliminated after the Revolution, and the words мир ('peace') and мip ('commune/people') became homonyms. That is why the whole title is now often rendered into English as *War and Peace*, while it should be rather translated: "War and the People."

This spiritual unity was designed not as an administrative communality. "Collectivism is not conciliatory but communal," the Russian critic of communism, Nikolay Berdiaev, pointed out. But, after the October Revolution, the ideal of conciliarism (internal unity) was replaced by communality (external unity) under Stalin's rule. Most popular movies from Stalin's time had, in their titles, the first person plural, or at least emphasized the unity of the Soviet people rather than their individuality, e.g.: "We are from Kronshtadt," "A Sixth Part of the World," "Forward, Soviets!," "The Strike," "The Earth." This

reflected the political rhetoric of the time, when even common people had to use in their public speeches expressions like “Мы, советский народ...” (‘We, the Soviet people...’).

It is no wonder that one of the most famous anti-utopian novels by Evgeniy Zamiatin, written exactly at that time, was called *We*. And it is of particular interest that *We* is a satire not only on Soviet depersonalization, but on capitalist depersonalization as well. The people in *We* live in apartments with glass walls so they can be watched all the time, even in the most intimate moments of their lives. Also during Stalin’s period of Soviet history an expression “my Pushkin” originating from the Russian emigr poet Marina Tsvetaeva’s book of the same title, was transformed in the Soviet Russia into “our Pushkin,” widely used while officially celebrating anniversaries of Pushkin’s birth.

Only during Khrushchev’s period of Thaw were films titled with the first person singular, like: “I loved you,” “I am walking in the city of Moscow,” “I am twenty years old,” etc. But, even in the last years of the USSR, the pronoun *I* was often used in an impersonal way. For instance, there was a well-known socialist realist film about the communist republic of Cuba, “I am Cuba.” Its director, Serguei Kalatozov, wanted to say that he cared as much about Cuba as if he himself were Cuba. He identified himself in this title not with his own country, as Korean people sometimes do, but with another country.⁵⁾

5) Certainly, a simple changing of the author’s *point of view* takes place here, and this example is interesting only in terms of an unusual usage of the personal pronoun. A similar, but even more hyperbolic, metaphor can be found in a popular song of the 1970-1980’s. The author of this song identified himself with the whole planet:

Я-- Земля. Я своих посылаю питомцев --

One can make a joke that in socialist times even the personal pronouns had an impersonal character. In the popular Brezhnev times the whole Soviet country was signified by means of personal pronouns only:

Я, ты, он, она
 Вместе целая страна.
 (I, you, he, she
 Together we constitute the whole country.)

The unity of the Soviet people was emphasized in this song, rather than their independence and individuality.

As is well seen in the examples given above, the first person singular, when it is identified with the whole country or the people, can sound totalitarian. Some Western monarchs spoke of themselves in the first person singular, while identifying themselves with the whole state. “The State is Me,” the eighteenth-century French monarch Louis XIV once boastfully declared. Theodore Roosevelt’s phrase, “The future of Poland has been agreed to by Russia, by Britain and by me,” is regarded by a contemporary historian as an example of dictatorial style: “The personal pronouns ‘me’ and ‘I’ had become synonymous with the United States in Roosevelt’s mind.”⁶⁾

Сыновей, дочерей:
 Долетайте до самого солнца
 И домой возвращайтесь скорей.
 (I am the Earth. I am sending my nurslings —
 My sons and daughters:
 “Reach the very Sun,
 And come back home soon.”)

6) “Covering the Map of the World, The Half-Century Legacy of the Yalta Conference: Part VIII,” by Richard M. Ebeling, *The Future of Freedom*

As already mentioned, in Russian the people's emotions are often described not in the nominative, but in the dative case. This is particularly the case as far as people's emotions and conditions are concerned. We say "Мне грустно" (literally 'To me is sad'), "Мне весело" ('To me is cheerful'), and even "Это мне нравится" ('To me this likes'). This last example is remindful of French "Il me plait," although in this French version *me* is accusative rather than dative. Expressions like "it seems to me" and "it pleases me" come close to the Russian "мне хочется," but such expressions are quite limited in number. Russian 'dative of perception' constructions have analogues in German (*Das gefällt mir*).

Emotions are expressed in Russian not as if people possess them, but, rather, on the contrary, as if the emotions themselves own the people. Wezhibitzka (1992, 405) calls this phenomenon "the unconscious character of the Dative emotions" and regards them as a display of the passiveness and fatalism of Russian people. Passions in these phrases look active, while the people who experience them are defined by Russian grammar as passive. However, there is another way of looking at this issue.

Implicit in this kind of interpretation "is the assumption that all human actions, physiological, mental, emotional and others are under the people's control. This assumption contradicts our everyday

Foundation. Oct. 1995. Examining Russian political speeches delivered between 1964 and 1993, another researcher reports that Russian politicians manifested an increase in the use of the first-person singular voice, and an increase in the use of personal pronouns. The author claims these changes reflect a decreasing conceptual distance between politicians and the populace. Such changes are typical of shifts from authoritarianism to democracy, he suggests. (Anderson 1996:145-164)

experience as well as the data of psychology.” This approach has become common in Russian linguistics lately. Its proponents remind us also that, among the dative-of-perception constructions, “noticeably predominant are those which describe physical conditions of a person.” Wezhbitzka’s works demonstrate “a tendency in Western countries to negatively evaluate all kinds of passive voice.”⁷⁾

As we can see in most Romance languages, presence of clear formal markers of person eliminates the necessity of using personal pronouns, which will be employed only for emphasis. The same thing can be said of Russian and other Slavic languages. On the other hand, English lacks verbal endings, apart from the third person singular of the present tense. It is sometimes unclear, therefore, who is speaking and who is being spoken to.

The verb endings in Korean do indicate who is speaking and who is being spoken to, or about. This is done not through conjugation of verbs, but through honorific, plain and self-effacing suffixes. This has the effect of eliminating the strict necessity of using personal pronouns, suiting the very nature of Korean language in which things are far more often implied through context than in languages like English and Russian⁸⁾

There is no need, while speaking Korean, to use second person

7) See, for example, Arinshtein (1998:14), Khrakovskii (1991:179) and Nikitin (1996:107). At the same time another contemporary Russian linguist sees the most important feature of Fyodor Dostoyevsky’s novels in the fact that passions govern their characters. This feature, in its turn, is regarded as reflection of a national mentality with its irrationalism, emotionalism and lack of self-control (Arutiunova 1999:867).

8) According to the point of view of some Korean experts, Korean language “is designed to be vague (See: De Mente 1998:126).”

pronouns: “the word *you* is usually left out of Korean speech, because it is understood. Titles are also commonly used in place of *you*, especially when people do not know the names of those being addressed” (De Mente 1998:35).

4

The use of Korean second person pronouns are sometimes quite confusing. The word corresponding to ‘you’ is 너 between equals, between people of the same age and position, between friends or people who know each other well, or when a senior addresses a juniors (usually children). Depending on whether the addressee is senior/superior or junior/inferior, 당신 or 자네 is used. But this description is by no means precise enough. For example, 자네, which is used toward an acquaintance junior by age and position, is in reality more polite and preserves a certain distance between the speaker and the addressee. A teacher may address his student as 자네, although such an appellation sounds somewhat old-fashioned today, especially among younger generations.

One should be very careful about the use of 당신. This pronoun has rather narrow and specific usage and can best be avoided in daily conversation when addressing to seniors. It is sometimes used when referring to one’s senior (even God)—as in 당신께서—but this refers to the senior in the third person, not as the ‘addressee.’ When 너 sounds too informal or impolite, one may address other person as 당신 to show certain respect toward the person. Perhaps this is why the pronoun is used between spouses, and it is not surprising that this way of addressing is often the case among close friends. Ironically, though,

당신 is also heard in a situation where the speaker is quarreling with the addressee. In brief, then, the pronoun in question is ‘honorific’ only under limited circumstances.

This is why I find this pronoun quite inappropriate in some contexts, say, as a polite or official translation of Russian ‘Вы.’ An expression like 당신 말이야 sounds rude and unceremonious and is likely to be used during street encounters, mostly in quarreling situations, as in Russian “Ты! Что ты базаришь?” (‘You! What the hell are you talking about?’).

As for 너, it is somewhat similar to Russian ‘ты,’ in that it is used only among close friends or while referring to children. In different situations it can easily acquire rudeness.

It is of great interest why both pronouns which sound quite respectful in a conversation between closely related people (spouses or friends) can very easily become unceremonious while used in reference to complete strangers. An answer to this question lies most likely in the following observation. The second person pronouns (당신, 너, 자네, and 그대), when addressed to people you hardly know or to complete strangers, destroy the distance of politeness between the speaker and the hearer by transforming the pronouns into familiar, informal ones. A similar situation manifests itself in Russian in which a not-very-hard-studying student addresses his teacher with the informal ‘ты’ (unfortunately a situation so rare in classrooms both at home and abroad).

There are no plain second person singular pronouns in Korean. Addressing someone with a personal pronoun always aims at expressing a special, usually a very close, relation, or signifies the lack of any distance due to insignificant age difference, close acquaintance

or situations of conflict.

It is clear that it is much more convenient, as far as it is possible, to avoid using personal pronouns. That is what really takes place in Korean speech. Koreans usually address each other by last names with the addition of an honorific suffix 씨, which means “Mr,” Mrs,” etc., or use special terms of family relations, or just start with a tension-drawing formulas like 저기요, 있잖아요, 여보세요, etc. Thus, an indirect way of indicating an addressee is the most preferred method of initiating communication. The repeated use of personal pronouns in Korean discourse can, and often does, have a grating effect on listeners. That is why a Korean, as in Chinese or Japanese, often suppresses personal pronouns without loss of clarity. The British, Americans and many other English-speaking people may do the same in their native language but only on telegrams. In general one should not forget that if the basis of Russian personal pronouns lies in a correlation between informal and formal, most Korean personal pronouns express hierarchy. In this respect Russian personal pronouns differ also from many other Asian languages.⁹⁾

As the Russian linguist and philosopher of a “Euroasian circle” Nikolay Trubetzkoy aptly pointed out, “the culture and way of life of every nation contain a number of features which one can see also in some other cultures and nations A comparative study of several ‘ethnological personalities’ living next to each other lets us make general conclusions about spiritual kinship of them” (Trubetzkoy 1995:110f). There is no doubt that the similarity between the Russian

9) This statement is also true, for instance, when applied to some languages spoken in India. See: Belikov & Krysin (2001:161f).

and Korean nations lies first of all in a more collective way of life as compared to Western nations. This collectivity, on the one hand, is a result of a slower historic development and of a longer preservation of a patriarchal society. On the other hand, it certainly represents special features of Russian and Korean cultures, which often show up in different ways due to different historical backgrounds.

A cultural specificity of the Korean people and to a certain extent of other nations of the Far East is well described by A. Lankov (2000:1):

Korea and the Far East in general were first of all a civilization of rice. As compared to other agricultural products, rice gives a maximum of calories from a unit of sown area. But rice, particularly rice requiring irrigation, is a special plant. Cultivating a rice field cannot be done by one family of peasants alone. A difference, for instance, between a wheat plantation and a rice one is that a rice plantation has a compound hydro-technical system which consists of hundreds of small fields subdivided by dikes and united by special canals. The construction of such a system and its maintenance requires collective efforts of hundreds and even thousands of people. But without these efforts the agricultural production in the Far East and the consequent survival of its population would not have been possible. Life under these kinds of conditions for decades has played an essential role in formulating Korean way of looking at things.

However, when the scholar further sees this specificity in the “ability of Koreans to work well and hard without asking too many questions, patiently enduring deprivations and obeying orders” and mentions that “even the most persistent work could not provide peasants a living in the Far East for a high level of life” (Lankov, *ibid.*), it occurs naturally to everyone that Russian peasants and peasants in some other countries

had to develop the same abilities and to endure the same conditions of life. We are speaking here about the same type of phenomenon, and this typological affinity has a certain social and historic nature. Korea is one of those countries, like Russia, where peasant communes were preserved for a very long time. Exactly because of that a Russian revolutionary thinker, Alexander Hertsen, looked at the Orient with big expectations. The Russian concepts of *община* or *мир* ('commune') have direct analogues in Korean language: 마을 공동체, 계 (두레).

In all societies a commune involves a certain collectivity, or a spiritual unity of the people ("соборность"). Korean collectivity is more familial and moral in character, while Russian conciliarism is more spiritual. Some scholars even nowadays find it possible to speak about the "collective identity," to which Korean people escape in order to avoid personal responsibility. (De Mente 1998:125) Korean collectivity is directly related to Korean neo-Confucianism based on the Chinese medieval philosophy of Zhu Xi (주자).¹⁰⁾ According to this, much more conservative and normative doctrine (called Sungri-hak), 'harmony' (화) "was achieved through the repression of individualism and the supremacy of collectivism and groupism." (De Mente 1998:135)

This has its direct reflection in the Korean language. It is well-known that "in Korean terms with a meaning of family relationships are widely used. At work, for instance, younger female coworkers call older female coworkers 언니 ('my elder sister'). When a Korean man calls another Korean man 'brother' (형), it does not

10) Confucius in Korean is 공자. The names of other philosophers of this trend are made with the same suffix 자. The concepts 'confucianism' (유교) and the doctrine of Confucius himself. (공자의 가르침) have different terms in Korean.

always mean that they are relatives. The word 형 used in informal situations is just a usual way of addressing each other—used by people who are about the same age and occupying approximately equal social position. Also, while speaking to strangers (men and women) whose age is more than 30 years old, Koreans also use terms of family relationships: 아저씨 (‘uncle’), 아주머니 (‘aunt’) or 아줌마 (‘auntie’) (Lankov 2000:9). Not only people of the same sex but also people of the opposite sex reproduce hierarchical family relations in their ways of address. For instance, students in a college and even colleagues at work often call each other with words which are originally designed for addressing the same family members: 누나 (a younger man to slightly older woman), 오빠 (a younger woman to a slightly older man), 동생 (men and women to the same or opposite sex younger person).

In the Russian language this phenomenon has never taken such a noticeable place. But to say that it is not present there at all would not be true. Even now Russian children could call adult strangers дядя or дяденька (‘아저씨’), or тётя or тётянька (‘아줌마/아주머니’). Unlike in the Russian language, in Korean a familiar variant of address is present only for addressing a woman.

All these special features of the Korean language are certainly not accidental but are related to the fact that Korean society traditionally was thought of as a family. A popular Korean fairy tale tells a story about three brothers who found in the mountains some costly ginseng and murdered each other in order not to have to share the money with others. The final message of the fairy-tale is: “Since then, Koreans have not been looking neither for ginseng, nor for money, but are looking to have more brothers” (Garin-Mikhailovskii 1916:302). In the

recent past the custom of making of sworn brothers (의형제) was widely practiced and cherished. Also, even a neighbor was often considered a cousin, as the word 이웃 사촌 suggests.¹¹⁾

The concept of family generally takes a central place not only in the doctrine of Korean society but also in the idea of the Korean state as well. A contemporary Western researcher writes about this as follows:

Under the Confucian concept of government and society the king was regarded as the symbolic father of the people who were expected to obey him as children obey their fathers. By extension, people were also expected to obey all government authorities because they were official representatives of the father-king. A generally unspoken corollary of the king-as-father concept was that people were not expected to respect or obey an unethical king and were justified in rebelling against him. (De Mente 1998:2)

If a Korean king in Korea was considered the whole nation's father, a family in general was 'a microcosm of the whole nation,' and as 'children owed absolute 복종 ('obedience') to their parents,' so too citizens had to obey a King. However, the family character of Korean communality should not mislead us to confuse Korean hierarchy as a basis for social order with the Christian ideas of universal brotherhood which didn't come to Korea until relatively late: "In the Confucian concept, 집 ('house') was the building block of Korean society, and it

11) With the development of capitalism in contemporary South Korean society, a more private way of life, and a certain alienation of people has taken place. While I was teaching at Pusan University of Foreign Studies, one of my students remarked that all these family terms are used sometimes when people want to get something (e.g., a discount in a market or in a store). And still expectations of mutual help between complete strangers in Korean society is much higher than in any contemporary Western society. One of the reasons for this is that the above mentioned traditional notions are still alive in many people's minds.

was in the family that the foundation was laid for hierarchical social and political order based on the absolute submission of inferiors to superiors.” (ibid., 168)

Exactly for this reason the same family model was put into a substructure of Korean management: “Koreans generally regard their places of employment as families, with all the attendant family-type responsibilities” (ibid., 34).¹²⁾ A clan organization is very characteristic of the whole Korean society, and “inside each group individuals maintain relations copied from the family ones, e.g. respect to their elders” (Lankov 2000:56).

A special significance of family and family connections in Korea is clearly expressed in a large number of words which signify family relationships. Some scholars observe that in the Korean language there are as many as “six different words for ‘grandmother,’ fifteen for ‘father,’ seven for ‘mother,’ twenty-three for ‘elder brother,’ seventeen for ‘uncle,’ nine for ‘aunt,’ seven for ‘husband,’ sixteen for ‘wife,’ ten for ‘sons,’ eleven for ‘sister’ — with the use of each one determined by the blood relationship between the individuals involved” (De Mente 1998:40), and add that “there are special words for older brothers and younger brothers, for older sisters and younger sisters, for paternal uncles and aunts, etc. that are used automatically but with everyone fully aware of their social implications” (op. cit., 169). Even if we take into account that many out-of-date words have been counted here as well, these figures still look very impressive. The Russian language has fewer words for family relations, but they are nevertheless much more

12) In Russia there is no such phenomenon. If, for instance, Russians use a family term while speaking about senior soldiers’ treatment of junior soldiers (дедовщина) in the army, it has certainly negative connotations.

numerous than in Western Indo-European languages. Words like свёкор, деверь, золовка and many others are almost as impossible for foreigners to command fully as their Korean counterparts.

One can with some reservations say that a kind of family version of Russian conciliarism (соборность) takes place in Korean society.¹³⁾ These cultural parallels may have their origin in the corresponding phenomena of the Russian and Korean languages. On the other hand, these linguistic similarities themselves may have their source in the similar cultures. Lately some serious changes have taken shape in the Korean social consciousness. This perhaps will soon be reflected in Korean speech and will most likely start to gradually level out the linguistic hierarchy of the sort we have seen above.

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13) Certainly, the concept of 'conciliarism' as it was thought in an idealist way by Russian philosophers means not 'external' but an 'internal' unity of people while Korean attachment to family life is rather a practical and real life phenomenon. But this difference to a certain extent suits general differences between Korean and Russian civilizations.

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Abstract

The Russian language uses more words that imply collectivism than Western

Indo-European languages. In Korean, the first-person plural pronouns are used more often than in Western languages. In this respect, Russian seems to stand closer to the latter, although typologically it belongs to the Indo-European family. The predominance of 'we' over 'I,' which took place in the history of the Russian language, had something to do with the Russian commune and the ecclesiastical and spiritual concept of 'sobornost' (соборность). A similarity between the Russian and the Korean nations lies in a collective way of life as compared to Western nations. The Russian concepts of община and мир ('commune') have direct analogues in the Korean language. In all societies a commune involves a certain sense of collectivity, or spiritual unity of the people – 'sobornost' (соборность). Korean collectivity is more familial and moral in character, whereas Russian 'sobornost' is more spiritual. This has its direct reflection in Korean and Russian languages. One can say that a sort of a family version of Russian 'sobornost' takes place in Korean society.