Ditching ‘Diglossia’: Describing Ecologies of the Spoken and Inscribed in Pre-modern Korea

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ABSTRACT
This paper critiques previous research about the relationship between speech and writing in East Asia in general, and in Korea in particular, with a view to two questions of terminology: how to refer to the complex ecology of spoken and written language in pre-20th century Korea, and how to refer to the broader East Asian cultural formation of which Korea was a part. Following the seminal work of Sheldon Pollock on the ‘Sanskrit Cosmopolis,’ the author proposes the term ‘Sinographic Cosmopolis’ for the regions of East Asia that used Literary Sinitic and sinographs, and presents arguments suggesting that the term ‘diglossia’ has little or no utility in discussing ecologies of speech and writing, whether in pre-modern Korea or in the broader Sinographic Cosmopolis.

Keywords: Sinographic Cosmopolis, Literary Sinitic, hanmun, idu, sinographs, diglossia, genbun itchi, onmun ilchi, kanji bunkaken, hundoku, hundok, cosmopolitan and vernacular, vernacularization

Introduction
This is a paper about two seemingly simple and inconsequential questions of terminology: how to refer to the complex ecology of spoken and written language in pre-20th century Korea, and how to refer to the broader East Asian cultural formation of which Korea was a part. But as I hope to demonstrate, these two terminological questions are far less simple than they appear, and any discussion of them also begs important theoretical questions about the relationship between cosmopolitan and vernacular in the history of Korean language and writing.

The complex relationship between spoken and written language in pre-modern Korean has frequently been referred to in both Korean- and English-language research as ‘diglossia,’ the original and by now classic definition of which can be found in Ferguson (1959):

Diglossia is a relatively stable language situation in which, in addition to the primary dialects of the language (which may include a standard or regional standards), there is a very divergent, highly codified (often grammatically more complex) superposed variety, the vehicle of a large and respected body of written literature, either of an earlier period or in another speech community, which is learned largely by formal education and is used for most written and formal spoken purposes but is not used by any sector of the community for ordinary conversation.1

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On the face of it, this definition fits pre-modern Korean literary culture reasonably well, and indeed, that literary culture has been routinely (if uncritically) categorized as ‘diglossic’ in much research to date. But as I hope to show below, for a variety of reasons a blithe characterization of pre-modern Korea as ‘diglossic’ explains little, and begs theoretical questions about the status of language, writing and translation in pre-modern Korean literary culture, about the relationship between ‘Chinese’ language and writing and Korean vernacular language and inscription in traditional Korea, and about the vocabulary that we use today as we struggle to understand and better contextualize and historicize these issues.

Translocal Cultural Formations and the Problem of ‘Diglossia’

The two most obvious issues in any discussion of the terminology relevant to characterizing ecologies of speech and writing in pre-modern Korea center on region and relationship: how are we to refer to the larger, translocal cultural and geographical context in which pre-modern Korean inscriptional practice was located, and how are we to characterize the relationship that held between the languages and inscriptional technologies deployed?

The Region

Traditionally speaking, or at least speaking about academic parlance before the advent of focused comparative scholarship on the traditional literary cultures of the region, English-language treatments spoke simply of ‘East Asia,’ the ‘Far East,’ the ‘Sinicite sphere,’ and so forth. For example, Galik (1995, 227) discusses the “interliterary community of the Far East,” while in other work (2001, 123-24) he talks of “supranational literary units” and the “intercultural community (or commonwealth) of the Far East,” but does not engage in any sustained theoretical discussion and is weak on Korea. In her useful overview of translation traditions in what she calls the ‘East Asian cultural sphere,’ Wakabayashi (2005, 19) moots ‘Sinicite Asia,’ ‘countries under the Sinocentric order’ and ‘Han sphere,’ in addition to referencing the Japanese term kanji bunkaken (漢字文化圈 Chinese character cultural sphere) and its Sino-Korean rendition, hancha munhwakwön.

The earliest sustained comparative treatment of pre-modern East Asian literary cultures of which I am aware is the ambitious trilogy by Korean scholar Cho Tongil (1999a-c), a work that deserves more attention than it has received.

1 Ferguson’s four defining examples were the Arabic world (Classical Arabic as opposed to the ‘dialects/spoken vernaculars’), Greece (Katharevousa as opposed to Demotic); German-speaking Switzerland (High German as opposed to Swiss German); and Tamil-speaking India (Classical Tamil as opposed to colloquial Tamil). That is, his classic cases all involved genetically related H[igh] and L[ow] varieties. Fishman (1967) added to the original scope of diglossia by including cases of genetically unrelated varieties and by making the social compartmentalization of function and language the central characteristic of diglossia. Ferguson (1991) later objected to this “extended” notion of diglossia. See Gallego (2003), Snow (2010), and the conclusions section below for more discussion.
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but thus far has been doomed to obscurity because it is written in Korean. Cho’s primary objective is to chart a new course for the comparative study of the history of world literatures, particularly in the medieval period—a course that he hopes will avoid the positivism (i.e., “the inductive method of the Positive History School” [1999a, 69]), presentism, and euro-centrism that he finds has characterized most prior research. Cho distinguishes different ‘civilizational spheres’ (munmyŏngkwŏn 文明圈), which for him are defined by a) geographic region, b) a ‘common literary language’ (kongdongmunŏ 共同文語) and c) a universal religion. With respect to the region of most interest to us here, in the second volume of the trilogy (1999b: Kongdongmunŏ munhak kwa minjŏgŏ munhak ‘Literature in the common literary language and literature in the ethno-national language’), Cho dedicates Chapter Two to “The fundamental relationship between literature in the common literary language and literature in the ethno-national language” and Chapter Three to “Literature in Literary Sinitic (Hanmunhak) and ethno-national literature,” and distinguishes between an ‘East Asian civilizational sphere’ (tongasia munmyŏngkwŏn) and the ‘Hanmun civilizational sphere’ (hanmun munmyŏngkwŏn). These are not the same, as there were ‘ethno-nations’ (minjok 民族)—a problematic term that rather mars Cho’s otherwise very stimulating book—in East Asia that did not use hanmun. For Cho (1999b, 68), the important problem is neither the history of literature in the common literary language nor the history of literature in the ‘ethno-national language’ (minjŏgŏ 民族語), but rather the history of their relationship. I will return to Cho’s work again below, but such is a preliminary overview of his project and some of his terms, all of which remain the most comprehensive treatment of this subject to date from a Korean perspective.

I have already mentioned the Japanese term kanji bunkaken (‘Chinese character cultural sphere’) above, and at first blush the term seems unobjectionable enough, but a closer look reveals the potential for controversy. According to Lurie (2011, 348-49), this term was first used by Japanese linguist Kōno Rokurō in an article in Kamei et al. (1963), and both Lurie and Duthie (2014, 2) note that the term was subsequently popularized by Japanese historian Nishijima Sadao (1919-1998) in the context of his ideas about an “East Asian world” (higashi ajia sekai). The term can thus be seen as a post-World War II Japanese euphemism invented to lay claim intellectually once again to a sphere that in earlier decades the Japanese called Tōyō 東洋 or the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere (Daitō Kōei Ken 大东亚共荣圈). In Saito (2009), Japanese scholar Saitō Mareshi uses the English term ‘Sinographic sphere,’ and at a conference dedicated to the region in question held at the University of British Columbia (UBC) in 2012,¹ he explained his preference

² Cho himself does not use Chinese characters in his expository prose, but I give the sinographs (in their Korean guise) for the benefit of colleagues in Chinese, Japanese, and Vietnamese studies.

³ Ko Youngran (2013) shows that it was in fact Kamei Takashi who coined the term in the process of editing Kamei et al. (1963): See Lurie (2013, 348-50) and related notes for a critique of the notion of ‘character culture’ (kanji bunka).

⁴ See King (ed., forthcoming-a-d) for this and other conferences held at UBC since 2011 on questions of language, writing, and literary culture in the Sinographic Cosmopolis.
for the Japanese equivalent in *kanjiken* 漢字圈, because the term *bunka* 'culture' in *kanji bunkaken* carries the unfortunate and inaccurate implication that the various regions in this sphere that covered such vast expanses of both time and space were somehow the same.

Kyoto University professor Kin Bunkyō (aka Kim Mun'gyŏng) takes a different tack in his 2010 book, titled *Kanbun to higashi ajia: Kundoku no bunkaken*, which might be translated as “Literary Sinitic and East Asia: The cultural sphere of ‘reading by gloss.’” However one wishes to translate *kundoku* 訓讀, the point here is that Kim calls attention to the multiple ways in which Literary Sinitic was read in the region, and focuses on the phenomena of vernacular *reading* of Literary Sinitic as opposed to Literary Sinitic *writing*.

By far the most ambitious work to date on questions of comparative literary cultures in the pre-modern period is that of Sheldon Pollock on what he initially called the ‘Sanskrit ecumene’ (1996) and later, after an entire series of seminal articles, called the ‘Sanskrit cosmopolis’ (2006). As a South Asianist and Sanskritist, Pollock does not devote much attention to East Asia, but his overall theorization of what might be called ‘comparative vernacularization’ is extremely useful and deserves close attention from those of us working in East Asia. With respect to terminology, Pollock makes the following interesting comments about a) the role of writing systems, and b) self-conscious notions of translocal community, in both European Latinitas and the ‘Sanskrit cosmopolis,’ the two cosmopolitan formations he studied most intensively in his book:

a) Writing systems/script

“An additional, small but telling sign of the difference between our two cosmopolitanisms is the graphic sign itself. Roman script was constitutive of Latin literature… *arma virumque cano* could be written in only a single alphabet. The graphic forms of Sanskrit literature, by contrast, were innumerable…” (Pollock 2000, 605)

b) Notions of translocal community

“No developed conception of an ‘immense community’ is found, as in Christendom, Ummah Islam, and the Middle Kingdom. There is no fixity—‘unsubstitutability’ or ‘non-arbitrariness’—of Sanskrit’s written sign, as in Latin, Arabic, Chinese, which Anderson believes helps constitute such a community. The scripts used for Sanskrit changed over time…” (Pollock 1996, 232)

In East Asia, we are clearly dealing with a different set of parameters. But the first point to be made concerning the ‘Chinese’ written sign concerns not so much its ‘fixity’ as a written sign, but its plasticity as a *read* sign. This is why Cho Tongil (1999b, 52) correctly singles out the fact that Literary Sinitic was a written language and not a spoken language and highlights this as a major difference with Sanskrit,

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5 That is, the first words of Virgil’s *Aeneid.*
Latin, and Arabic and the other ‘common literary languages’ he examined.\(^6\) For Cho, this rendered hanmun ‘two-sided’: it could represent simultaneously the common literary language and the ethno-national language and for Cho this explains why there was never any urgent need felt in the region in medieval times to replace hanmun with the ethno-national language. The same point has been made in other ways by scholars writing in English. For Mair (1994, 708), Literary Sinitic is a “demicriptography largely divorced from speech” and therefore essentially “unsayable,” and Kornicki (2010, 41) notes that there is no “authentic” or “correct” way of pronouncing literary Chinese.\(^7\) Indeed, as hinted at in the title of John Whitman’s paper for the 2012 conference at UBC, we are dealing in East Asia (in Japan and Korea, at least) with ‘hidden vernaculars’—vernacular reading traditions concealed behind kundoku-hundok-type technologies of interlinear vernacular glossing, all of which add additional layers of complexity to what was emphatically not a simple binary divide between H[igh] and L[ow] varieties. David Lurie (2011) makes the same point in his recent book in his discussions of kundoku as alloglottography (see Rubio 2006 for the term) and in his closing call for the need to focus not on ‘Chinese writing’ but on traditions of reading ‘East Asian script’ in local languages.\(^8\)

So in one sense, when scholars like Pollock familiar with historical processes of vernacularization in South Asia or Europe look to pre-modern East Asia and ask “where’s the vernacular?” the answer is that the vernaculars were always there, but hidden from view behind kundoku-type vernacular reading practices. Kornicki (2010, 43) writes: “It is bizarre but true that writers who knew not a word of Japanese could produce texts that in Japan were read as Japanese: such was the reality of Sinitic reading traditions.”

Nonetheless, while these correctives might help explain why, in the modern

\(^6\) Yi Ki-moon (1975, 21-22) makes a similar point when he writes: “…however, an important difference between hanmun and Latin is overlooked: the former was purely a written language, whereas the latter was a written as well as spoken language of the universities.” Indeed, this is yet another reason to reject ‘diglossia’ when characterizing pre-modern East Asia in general, and Korea in particular.

\(^7\) This is why a claim like that in Fenkl (2014, 360) is bogus: Fenkl presumes that his use of modern-day Mandarin pinyin renditions of place names and personal names from China in his new translation of Kim Manjung’s 17th-century Korean novel written in hanmun and set in Tang China is somehow more ‘authentic’ than Gale’s 1922 translation in which such proper nouns are rendered in their Sino-Korean readings. Such names would have been pronounced in a myriad of ways even within China itself—all of them ‘authentic.’ There are other problems with Fenkl’s essay, not the least of which is his claim that Gale and Rutt were both Catholic priests (Gale was Presbyterian, and Rutt Anglican, though he was received into the Roman Catholic Church after his retirement as an Anglican bishop).

\(^8\) Cho (1999a, 407) makes a similar point when he complains that it is ‘unfair’ (pudang) to refer to classics common to all of East Asia as ‘Chinese literature’ and to call the relevant world empire ‘a nation of the Chinese.’ Ditto for Kornicki (2008, Lecture 2, p. 22), who refers to “the loose and unsatisfactory term ‘Chinese texts.” Denecke’s (2006, 286) remarks about Sino-Japanese literature in this connection are just as relevant to Korea: “It is hard to imagine how the marginalized role of Chinese impact and of the history of Sino-Japanese literature could be brought into focus, because it is conflicted territory for Japanese consciousness and an implicit reproach to current national literary history. Neither is it of great interest to the Chinese….”

\(^9\) See also Frank (1988) for a discussion of “the amazing example of a text susceptible to reading in two languages.”
period in a place like Korea, writers in the first two decades of the 20th century were able to create a modern, literary Korean idiom so quickly (a process, the speed of which has been marveled at by a number of literary historians), they still do not change the fundamental fact that nothing vaguely similar to vernacularization as defined by Pollock for South Asia and Europe ever happened in Korea, and especially not throughout most of the 19th century when it was in full swing virtually everywhere else in the world except East Asia.

With respect to the question of self-conscious conceptions of translocal community again, my own preference is for the term ‘Sinographic Cosmopolis.’ Some colleagues prefer the term kanbun (as opposed to kanji) bunkaken when speaking of pre-modern East Asia, and point out that the unifying feature was not so much Chinese characters themselves, as it was the common training in Literary Sinitic and the culture it embodied. Torquil Duthie of UCLA (personal communication) has voiced a similar motive behind his preference for Sinoscript Cosmopolis over Sinographic Cosmopolis, on the grounds that ‘script’ somehow captures the more overarching and systematic features of an entire writing system than individual sino-graphics. A similar emphasis on Literary Sinitic–hanmun–kanbun–hanvan (the latter for Vietnam) as a shared literary code leads Scott Wells to prefer the term [Literary] Sinitic Cosmopolis (Wells 2011), while other scholars have opted for ‘Sinosphere’ (Whitman 2011) or Saito’s ‘Sinographic Sphere,’ as noted above.

I myself continue to prefer ‘cosmopolis’ for the same reasons that Pollock uses it—for its supraregional dimension and for the prominence given to both the political dimension (Pollock 2006, 12) and to the “common aesthetics of political culture” (14). In this regard, I would also note that others have started to use the term ‘cosmopolis’ for parallel translocal cultural formations: for example, Rebecca Gould (2008) with regard to the ‘Persian cosmopolis’ and Ronit Ricci (2011) with regard to the ‘Arabic cosmopolis of South and Southeast Asia.’ And I prefer the ‘graphic’ in ‘Sino-graphic’ precisely because it is the graphological and scriptological dimension that makes this sphere so fundamentally different from the mega-regions studied by Pollock (more on this below). So in the usage I am advocating, the ‘graphic’ in ‘Sinographic’ indexes not so much individual sino-grams–sino-graphics (the kanji in kanji bunkaken), but the reliance on Chinese writing in general in the region, not simply in the form of ‘Chinese characters’ but also (crucially) in the form of other modes of inscription used in conjunction with and/or otherwise inspired by or derived from Chinese writing (Japanese kana, Korean idu, kugyŏl, and hyangch’al, Vietnamese chữ nôm, etc.).

Finally, I should also touch on the problem of what to call the cosmopolitan language in our region. By now it will be clear that I prefer Victor Mair’s term ‘Literary Sinitic,’ if only because of the need to steer away, whenever possible, from the word ‘Chinese’ when discussing phenomena that require far more than just a knowledge

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10 See King 2014.
11 See also Duthie 2014, 16-18.
of China and Chinese in order to understand the cosmopolitan formation in question. Here too Cho Tongil (1999c, 495), in one of his rare papers available in English ("Historical Changes in the Translation from Chinese Literature: A Comparative Study of Korean, Japanese and Vietnamese Cases"), is a kindred spirit: "The visual aspect of the common classical language of East Asia confirms the unity of a civilization, the audial aspect its diversity. The term classical or written "Chinese" is inadequate, as it leads to misunderstanding of both aspects." Cho goes on to claim that since none of Korea, Japan or Vietnam can opt for the term "Chinese," this term is in effect out-voted. He opts, however, for the equally unacceptable term ‘Han’—"the written language of East Asian civilization"—a term that will almost certainly never gain any traction. So I prefer ‘Literary Sinitic,’ but because it is at times clumsy and because my own primary field of research concerns Korea, I do freely also use the term hanmun (itself almost certainly a late 19th-century loan into Korean from Japanese kanbun) to stand in for Literary Sinitic.

The Relationship

So how are we to refer to the relationship between the cosmopolitan written language and the vernacular(s)? The single most frequently used term to this day (in English-language scholarship, at least) is ‘diglossia,’ a term that has been and continues to be used in such a bewilderingly wide variety of sociolinguistic, cultural, and historical contexts as to render it largely meaningless. In this regard, Coulmas’s paper (1991) is useful, given the author’s erudition in Japan’s pre-20th-century ecologies of language and writing, which were every bit as complex as those of Korea. With respect to the term ‘diglossia,’ he references (125) "...a process of interpretation and reinterpretation, refinement and theoretical sophistication, which eventually leaves the notion quite hackneyed and nearly devoid of meaning. There is almost no situation of coexisting codes in a society which has not been referred to as diglossia.” It is interesting to note in this regard that while sociolinguistic configurations from around the Arabic-speaking world were instrumental in inspiring the term ‘diglossia’ in the first place, even Arabists in recent years have questioned the utility of the term. In his work on Morocco, Maier (1996, 311) writes: “Originally designed for the media, Modern Standard has already made ‘diglossia’ much too simple a notion to describe the sociolinguistic intricacies of Arabic. M. H. Bakalla prefers the term spectroGLOSSIA for that reason” (1984, 87).

One of the first South Korean scholars to introduce the notion of diglossia to Korean academia was Pak Sunham (1997). But even she (65) noted the ever-widening range of application of the term and its increasingly complex typology. Interestingly, Pak confined her application of the term to the relationship between Korean and Japanese during the Japanese colonial period, and to a thought-provoking proposal for considering the relationship between diasporic varieties of Korean like ‘Koryo mal’ in the former Soviet Union to standard varieties on the Korean peninsula as a kind of ‘diglossia;’ she refrained from applying the term to pre-modern Korea and the relationship between Literary Sinitic and vernacular Korean. Korean scholars have also begun to use this term in recent years to
characterize the relationship between Literary Sinitic and vernacular Korean in pre-modern Korea, but cannot agree on a Korean equivalent: one encounters *yangch’uŋ onø hyönsang* (Pak Sunham 1997 and Chang Yusüng 2005; lit.: ‘double-layered language phenomenon’ 雙層言語現象) and *yangch’uŋ onøsøng* (Chong Soyôn 2011; lit.: ‘double-layered langue-ness’ 雙層言語性), *yangch’uŋ onø ch’egye* (Cho Sŏngsan 2009; lit.: ‘double-layered language system’ 二重言語體系), wherein the two languages in question are referred to as the *popyønô* 普遍語 ‘universal language’ and *chaugogô ju’gukyu’ language of one’s own country; local language; vernacular’), as well as just *taigüllösia* in Korean transliteration (Yi Hyŏnhũ et al. 2014). And some Korean scholars simply use the English word itself, albeit not always accurately: cf. ‘diaglossia’ (Cho Tongil 1999b, 58 and Chŏng Pyŏngsŏl 2009) and ‘diaglosia’ (An Taehoe 2006).

Perhaps more dangerous for the modern Korean context, though, is the way in which the inherent “twoness” in diglossia—the ‘either/or’–dialectic implications endemic to the “di-” prefix in the term—have played into modern Korean script nationalism, leading most Korean researchers to cast *hanmun* and *han’gul* as villain and hero, respectively, in teleological grand narratives of the long struggle of *han’gul* to overcome adversity and discrimination in benighted pre-modern ‘ideographic’ times in order to finally win the day in an enlightened modern and phonographic Korea. This same type of discourse bleeds into English-language research by Korean researchers like Yu Cho (2002), who writes of the “tension of diglossia that prevailed for more than a millenium,” “the mounting diglossic tension,” “the sharp dichotomy between high and low” in the “burden of the age-old diglossia” characterized by “linguistic and cultural anxieties,” the “suffocating” and “doubly-binding restriction of diglossia,” and links this diglossia to “age-old despair” while characterizing the invention of the Korean script as therefore something “natural” that led to an improvement in Korean literature. She writes: “In its poetry the modern Korean language has finally come alive by taking off the burden of the age-old diglossia.”

Such scripto-nationalist views stand in stark contrast to the more nuanced understanding of Cho Tongil, who writes (1999b, 465): “It is ridiculous to claim that one loves hangagul... To reject the cultural heritage achieved in the common literary language solely on the basis of love for the ethno-national language, and to claim that even just the fact of having used a common literary language was tantamount to betraying ethno-national identity, is to invite intellectual poverty.” And speaking more generally of the phenomenon (1999b, 35), Cho opines: “The common literary language did not obstruct the growth of the ethno-national

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13 The same anachronistic and teleological thinking can be found in Peter H. Lee (2003, 337), who writes: “[With the transition from Chinese to Korean as the principal written language of the Korean people... [the] linguistic aspiration to use the natural language of the Korean people was realized.” See also Kichung Kim (1996, 4-5) who writes that “The invention of han’gul should have marked a turning point in the history of written language in Korea... Han’gul made it possible, for the first time, to banish the alien writing...this debilitating split between the spoken and written languages persisted...”
language; it expedited it. From the common literary language they learned to write; and with that script they inscribed their own languages, translated into their own languages the contents conveyed by the common literary language, and strove to raise writing in their own language to a level on a par with the common literary language—these are all phenomena that can be confirmed everywhere around the globe.⁵

So there are a number of problems with applying the term ‘diglossia’ to the complex relationships between cosmopolitan and vernacular codes in medieval cultural formations where the cosmopolitan language was what nowadays would be called a ‘dead language.’ French scholar of Japanese Buddhism Jean-Noël Robert (2006, 29) complains, for example, that the origins of the term ‘diglossia’ in sociolinguistics to characterize a wide variety of situations ranging from creole languages to Modern Greek mean that “only sociolinguistic approaches will be deemed appropriate for its study.” Wakabayashi’s (2005, 26) characterization of the relationship as ‘linguistic dualism’ is nothing more than a paraphrase of diglossia.

Thomas Hunter (2011a, 35), an expert on the history of Sanskrit in Southeast Asia, criticizes representations of Sanskrit-Old Javanese ‘diglossia,’ with Sanskrit the high status variety in a dual layering of languages, because “…this conclusion fails to take into account the important fact that both Sanskrit and Old Javanese in its emerging literary form must be understood as specialized, elaborated codes that stood in contrast to the everyday speech of the time.” In other words, even situations characterized as ‘diglossic’ typically involve more than just two linguistic codes.¹⁵

Denecke (2006, 280) makes a similar point with respect to Japan: “Due to the lack of direct exposure to China, Japanese literature developed a unique trilingual constellation, in which literacy consisted of the mastery of Chinese, Sino-Japanese, and Japanese literary idioms. Sino-Japanese is a highly hybrid language…. It is impossible to describe this Sino-Japanese ‘third space’ on pure linguistic grounds.” Pre-modern Korea was characterized by linguistic and inscriptional variety every bit as complex as Japan, and thus ‘diglossia’ will simply not do.¹⁶

¹⁴ A similar view can be found already in Yi Ki-moon (1975, 25), who writes that the extended and extensive contact with Literary Sinitic “…resulted in a massive overflow of hanmun elements into Korean. This might be regarded as an evil from the Korean point of view, but it was a necessary evil, after all. It helped bring Korean to the point where it could serve adequately as the language of a mature Asian civilization.” Incidentally, Kim-Renaud (2000, 19) describes pre-modern Koreans as…”living in a special kind of diglossia, speaking Korean, but writing in written Chinese translation,” and cites this article by Yi Ki-moon in her defense, but Yi does not use the term ‘diglossia.’

¹⁵ See also Hunter (2011b, 6-10) for a critique of the rubric of ‘glossias’ in his discussion of Maier (1993). The ‘glossias’ he discusses are Bakhtinian hetero- and poly-glossia and Fergusonian di-glossia, but to these could be added Bakalla’s (1984) spectro-glossia.

¹⁶ See King (forthcoming-a) for detailed discussion of the varieties of inscriptional practice used in pre-modern Korea and their implications for our understandings of inter- vs intra-lingual translation. In this regard, it is not just the hundok-type glossing practices for Literary Sinitic texts, but especially the long tradition of vernacular writing in idu (吏讀) (a hybrid inscriptional system that used sinographs to render a form of vernacular Korean in Korean word order without ever using the Korean vernacular script) that undermines any supposed “two-ness” in pre-modern Korean ecologies of language and writing. Pace Yeounsuk Lee (2014, 146), idu was not a ‘peripheral’ system, but a robust intermediary and Janus-like system that could count as both sinographic (and hence in the realm of Literary Sinitic: mun 文) and vernacular (.hm) (see Yi Hyon-hui 2014 and Yi Yonggyeong 2014 for useful discussion).
But what are the alternatives? One European scholar who has tried to think broadly, comparatively, and theoretically about questions of cosmopolitan and vernacular language in Asia in recent years is French Buddhologist Jean-Noël Robert, who has contributed a paper in Japanese on “Kanbun for the XXIst century: the future of dead languages,” and another in English titled “Hieroglossia: a proposal.” In this latter contribution, besides rendering a prolonged critique of the term ‘diglossia’ he also proposes some new terms: ‘hieroglossia’ (his overarching term for the relationship, of which diglossia is merely a sub-type), ‘hypergloss’ (the ‘high’ or cosmopolitan language) and ‘laogloss’ (the ‘low’ or vernacular language). Robert urges the study of kanbun in a pan-Eurasian comparative context (he makes many useful comparisons to Latinitas, for example) and provides a broad and informative survey of ‘hieroglossic’ situations in Eurasia over the millennia. He writes (Robert 2006, 26):

“Within a hieroglossic relationship, the language perceived as dependent...will undertake, through the work of the clergy and literati, the much more subtle and deep task of reconstructing its own vocabulary, [and] reorientating its conceptual links on the basis of the hierogloss.... This new phenomenon within the laogloss will thus be considered an exegesis of the hieroglossic original, but not a true innovation. Such a hieroglossic relationship seems to obtain in all the religious and cultural areas of Eurasia.”

At the same time, Robert makes a number of assertions about the alleged ‘uniqueness’ of Japanese kanbun kundoku reading techniques, the use of the kaeriten or ‘back’ mark, etc., all of which need to be reconsidered in light of the new kugyol glossing finds in Korea and Japan. More to the point, though, his proposal of ‘hieroglossia’ as a new replacement for diglossia in medieval cultural formations is problematic because of the overly heavy emphasis on religion, a point on which he agrees with Cho Tongil but differs considerably with Sheldon Pollock, to whom I now return.

In his series of important works on ‘cosmopolitan and vernacular,’ Pollock abandons the term ‘diglossia’ in favor of the terms ‘superposition’ and ‘hyperglossia’: “That term [diglossia] as well as ‘bilingualism’ is inadequate for capturing the extreme compartmentalization—and the fact that it is society-wide—let alone difference in cultural opportunity, which are in evidence in the case of Sanskrit and such regional languages as I consider here (Kannada, Khmer, Javanese). This difference lies not merely in internal split (di-) but extreme superposition (hyper-) of different languages. The tension between, say, Sanskrit and Kannada, in the face of this superposition marks the entire history of the latter” (Pollock 1996, 208). And again ten years later in his book (2006, 50): “But the split in standards between Sanskrit and local language was such that “diglossia” seems an entirely inadequate category to describe it. For what we encounter is not an internal split (di-) in registers and norms, typically between literary and colloquial usage, in what local actors conceived of as a single language, but a relationship of extreme superposition (hyper-) between two languages that local actors knew to be entirely different. This modality, which I will call “hyperglossia,” was ubiquitous
in southern Asia before the vernacular revolution...” In another paper (2006b), Pollock characterizes diglossia as pertaining between a “higher pole and lower pole of the same language,” whereas hyperglossia indicates “a maximal form of language dominance” and a relationship where one language is used for expressive purposes, and another for the recording of the quotidian. Like Cho Tongil, he goes on to note (284) that the “very presence of a hyperglossic language is the primary condition of possibility for vernacularization.”

**Toward a New Terminology**

I have presented the above arguments in favor of the term ‘Sinographic Cosmopolis,’ and against the term ‘diglossia.’ The arguments against ‘diglossia’ are many; some are general and theoretical, others pertain specifically to the Korean case. Theoretically speaking, the problem of ‘diglossia’ is its fundamental “twoness”—its need for two distinct poles. An appeal to a continuum or spectrum, though, does not solve the problem and simply highlights the issue of intermediate and hybrid varieties. Paulillo (1994, 16) supposes that “[i]f an intermediate variety were to constitute a distinct canonical variety, a “third pole” distinct from H[igh] and L[ow] (Ferguson 1991), then the essential “twoness” of Ferguson’s (1959; 1991) characterization would break down.” But I would submit that the presence—in addition of course to the colloquial vernacular—of multiple intermediate inscriptive varieties alone (whether ‘canonical’ or not), as was the case in both Korea and Japan, is sufficient to render the term ‘diglossia’ largely useless. When one adds to this the other problems pointed out by numerous researchers, along with the Korea-specific problem of the ways in which the “diglossia discourse” fans the flames of modern-day scripto-nationalist narratives of han’gul’s triumph over an alien and evil hanmun, ‘diglossia’ needs to be ditched.

That leaves us with the problem of finding a replacement for ‘diglossia’ in the Sinographic Cosmopolis, and the best candidates to date are Pollock’s ‘hyperglossia’ and ‘superposition.’ I confess I am far less enthusiastic about ‘hyperglossia’ than I am about ‘Sinographic Cosmopolis,’ especially because it merely adds to the growing litany of ‘glossias.’ Indeed, in many ways the key weakness of all these ‘glossias’ is that the focus on just speech or language inherent to the term overlooks

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17 Given the many important parallels between pre-modern Korea and Japan when it comes to inscriptive practice, it is reassuring to note that Denecke (2013) avoids the terms ‘diglossia’ entirely throughout her book. But it is difficult to understand her lack of engagement with or even mention of Pollock’s work. The same goes for Yi Hyönhúi et al. (2014), who moot ‘cosmopolitan and vernacular’ without acknowledging Pollock, and uncritically adopt the term ‘diglossia’ throughout their book while citing counter-example after counter-example in their discussions of idu and kugyol. The papers in Árokay are also a disappointment in this regard. Hill (2010) provides a useful critique of Kaske’s attempts to apply ‘diglossia’ to Chinese.

18 Snow’s (2010) paper on diglossia in East Asia is unusual (and welcome) in that it tries to treat all of East Asia as one large ‘diglossic’ speech community, and offers much valuable comparative discussion, but it relies exclusively on secondary scholarship for Japan and Korea, is rather sinocentric in its approach, and is unaware of much of the research cited here; his attempt at distinguishing a ‘traditional’ from a ‘modern’ type of diglossia compounds (or simply displaces) the problem rather than solving it.

19 Note that Ferguson’s (1959) original definition of diglossia also used “superpose.”
yet again the key differentiating parameter for the Sinographic Cosmopolis, namely: writing systems in general and especially sinographic writing.

My own inclinations would be to look for a term indigenous to East Asia instead of continually pressing into service unhelpful terms created originally for different regions, contexts, and languages. But do we not already have such a term close to hand in East Asia? By the 18th and 19th centuries, Korean intellectuals were keenly aware of and increasingly writing about the “discrepancy between the spoken and written languages” (Yi Ki-moon 1975, 24) that characterized their day-to-day language life. Thus, Cho Sŏngsan (2009, 186) has documented the ways in which the Ming-Qing transition brought with it challenges to the ‘same-script consciousness’ (tongmun ǔisik 同文意識) of late-Chosŏn intellectuals, and Yi Kunsŏn (2007, 35) has described how these same “...Chosŏn intellectuals became conscious of the difficulties owing to the discrepancy (koeri 乖離) between [their] speech and writing when they saw Chinese people writing down their thoughts effortlessly” during their ‘brush conversations’ on embassies to Qing China. Yi Hyŏnhŭi et al. (2014) present numerous illuminating excerpts from the writings of 18th- and 19th-century Korean intellectuals that demonstrate their consciousness of this discrepancy. For example, Yi Kwangsa (李匡師, 1705-1777) writes in his “Preface to the Five Correct Sounds (Oumujo'ng 五音正序): “Speech and writing in our East are different” (我東言與文異) (cited in Kim and Kim 2014, 126-27).

Yi and Paek (2014, 253-540 cite Yi Hŭigyŏng's (李喜經, 1745 -?) Sŏlsu oesa (雪岫外史) as follows: “...Writing [文] is the basis, yet instead of using [Chinese] writing for speech, we [Koreans] created our own speech. Thus, when reading ‘天’ we do not read [tiān] but say “hanŭl CH’ŏn”20 …Speech goes one way, and writing another…our country is different [from China] and speech and writing are each different…there is surely no way to know what person at what time made the sounds of the sinographs so discrepant like this…we should all first learn Chinese.” (蓋文者 言之本 而不以文為言 別作其言 故呼天不曰天而曰漢乙天 … 言自言而文自文也 … 我國則不然 言與文各殊… 果未知何世何人創得文音而有此乖譌耶 … 莫如先解華音).” Likewise, Kim and Kim (2014, 135-36) citing Hong Kilchu’s (洪吉周, 1786-1841) essay “Miscellaneous notes on the Korean vernacular” (Tong'ŏn soch'o 東諺小鈔) from his collection Suksunyŏn 師隠念 write as follows: “Speech and writing in the Eastern Quarter are two distinct matters and are not mutually confluent…Generally speaking, in China speech and writing coincide, and therefore when speech changes, the sinographs change with it. But in the East [Korea], because speech and writing are separate, even though speech may change, the sinographs do not necessarily change with it.” (東方之言語文字判為兩件而不能相入... 蓋華則言語文字合 故語變而字隨以變 東則言語文字別故語雖變而字未必俱變)

The first modern-day movement to reconcile these differences between speech and writing in East Asia arose in Meiji Japan and was called genbun itchi 言文一致, translated variously as the “rapprochement of written and spoken Japanese”

20 For instance, the vernacular Korean word hanŭl for “heaven” rendered via sinographs used as phonograms (漢乙 han-ŭl) and the Sino-Korean pronunciation ch’ŏn for the sinograph 天.
Ditching ‘Diglossia’: Describing Ecologies of the Spoken and Inscribed in Pre-modern Korea

(Coulmas 1988), “unification of the spoken and written language” (Tomasi 1999, 333), “the congruence of speech and writing” (Kaske 2006, 19), “unity of spoken and written language” (Heinrich 2005, 113), “confluence of written and spoken language” (Gebert 2013, 13), “reconciliation of speech and writing” (Frederick 2008, 446; Levy 2006, 37), and so on. The same term was adopted subsequently in both Korea (pronounced おん문 ilch'i and, according to 호 Chaeyŏng (2011, 43), first attested in 1906) and China (pronounced yamwen yizhi, and taking on great importance during the linguistic and literary reforms associated with the May Fourth movement). But if there is general consensus around the term for the congruence (reconciliation, confluence, unification, unity, etc.) between speech and written language that was central to linguistic and literary modernity in the countries of the disintegrating Sinographic Cosmopolis, it is not entirely clear how we should designate the status quo ante. An obvious choice would be 言文二致 (K. おん문 ich'i, lit.: ‘speech-writing-two-poles’), but its use of 二 for “two” reproduces many of the same problems with ‘diglossia.’

A more attractive possibility would be おん문 pur-ilch'i 言文不一致—literally, the “mis-match (disparity, incongruity, disharmony, discord, disagreement, dissonance, discrepancy, nonconformity, non-alignment, etc.) between speech and writing,” a term used by contemporary Korean scholars like Cho Sŏngsan (2009), Kim and Kim (2014), and Yi and Paek (2014), among others. A final possibility is that suggested by Chang Yunhuì (2005, 109-10), who contends that the terms with ilch'i 一致 invite confusion with the discussions and debates about modern colloquial literary style, when instead it is the incompatibility of the ‘national language’ and sinographs—Literary Sinitic that is at issue. Instead, he suggests おん문 koeri 言文乖離, which we could translate as the “disconnect between speech and writing.”

Whether one opts for おん문 pur-ilch'i 言文不一致 “mismatch between speech and writing” or おん문 koeri 言文乖離 “gap between speech and writing,” either is an improvement on ‘diglossia,’ a term that should be gently discouraged in discussions of this nature in future.

21 The way in which this term, like ‘diglossia,’ lends itself to script-nationalist interpretations of the historical relationship between vernacular Korean language and script and Literary Sinitic can be seen in Yi Kimun’s pioneering book on Korean language and writing during the Enlightenment period (Yi Kimun 1970, 14): “…for a long time our ancestors led a deformed and abnormal (키hyoŋjŏk) language life whereby in speech they used the national language [sic] and in writing they used Literary Sinitic. That is, they had to suffer quite substantial inconvenience within a dualistic structure of spoken language and written language. Koreans during the Enlightenment period summed up this dualistic structure with the term ‘おん문 ich'i’ 言文二致.” A similarly partisan use of this term can be found in Yi Ungho (1975, 219-20), who castigates the newspaper Hwangsong sinmun for its adoption of Mixed Script orthography (루한문체), and brands it as a tyrannical and anti-hang’gul move on the part of the intellectual class, aggravating おん문 ich'i (rendered by Yi as ‘언문 칠치’ in line with his han’gul-only stance). While it is true that ‘おん문 ich'i’ 言文二致 was used occasionally in the Enlightenment period (Yi Pyŏngguin (2003, 10) cites an example from the Draft Recommendations of the National Script Institute (Kungmun yŏngu ujong an 국문研究議定案) of 1907), other terms were おん문 sango 言文相離 “mutual estrangement of speech and writing” (『皇城新聞』 1909.2.16., cited in Paek 2014, 84) and おん문[p] pudong 言文[이]不同 “non-identity of speech and writing” (Kugŏ munpop by Chu Sŏgyŏng (1910, 26), cited in Chŏng Sŏngch'ŏl (2005, 81).

22 The temptation is to translate this as “schizoglossographia,” but clearly this will never fly.
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