

# Dialects

Although the Korean language is relatively homogeneous – there is mutual intelligibility among speakers from different areas – there are minor but distinct dialectal differences. The Korean peninsula, both North and South Korea, may be divided into seven dialectal zones that correspond by and large to administrative districts:

1. Hamgyŏng Zone: North and South Hamgyŏng, extending to the north of Ch'ŏngp'yŏng, and Huch'ang in North P'yŏngan
2. P'yŏngan Zone: North and South P'yŏngan (excluding Huch'ang)
3. Central Zone: Kyŏnggi, Kangwŏn, Hwanghae, and South Hamgyŏng extending to Yŏnghŭng to the north
4. Ch'ungch'ŏng Zone: North and South Ch'ungch'ŏng and Kŭmsan and Muju in North Chŏlla
5. Kyŏngsang Zone: North and South Kyŏngsang
6. Chŏlla Zone: North and South Chŏlla (other than Kŭmsan and Muju)
7. Cheju Zone: Cheju



The dialect used by the Korean community in the Yanbian Autonomous Prefecture of China in Manchuria can be included in the Hamgyŏng Zone because it has evolved as part of the Hamgyŏng dialect due to the early immigration of Hamgyŏng people to that area and their subsequent linguistic contacts. The dialects spoken by Koreans in the other areas of China and other countries around the globe also reflect the seven dialectal zones, depending on where the speakers originally migrated from.

The major cause of the formation of the dialectal zones has been geographic, but historical and political factors have also played important roles. The characteristics of the Cheju dialect, for instance, have been shaped by its isolation from the mainland. Moreover, the two neighboring areas, Kyŏngsang and Chŏlla, manifest great differences since, in the past, there was no major transport network connecting the two zones. Historically, too, these two zones were under two different dynasties, Kyŏngsang under the Silla kingdom and Chŏlla under Paekche. Another historical factor explains the demarcation between the Hamgyŏng dialect and the Central dialect, where there is no natural barrier. During the Koryŏ and Chosŏn dynasties, the area between Chŏngp'yŏng in the Hamgyŏng Zone and Yŏnghŭng in the Central Zone was the site of constant battling between the Manchu tribes called Jurchens in the north and the Koreans in the south. After the Manchu tribes were driven north during the Chosŏn dynasty, P'yŏngan province was inhabited by people from neighboring Hwanghae and Hamgyŏng was settled mainly by people from Kyŏngsang in the south. This explains the similarity between the P'yŏngan dialect and the Central dialect, on the one hand, and between the Hamgyŏng dialect and the Kyŏngsang dialect on the other. While influencing one another, the two northern dialects have also been affected by foreign languages such as Chinese, Tungus, Jurchen, and Russian, a fact responsible for the maturation of the P'yŏngan and Hamgyŏng dialects.

Many characteristics are unique either to each dialectal zone or to only a few zones. The general intonation patterns, utterance tempo, and sound qualities are quite different from one dialect to another. Vocabulary, word structure, sentence structure, and usage too are all slightly dissimilar.

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