Ross King (University of British Columbia)

**Linguistic etiquette, women’s language, and moral panics in North Korean language planning discourse**

Abstract

The November 2013 issue of *Munhwado haksup* (Cultured Language Learning), North Korea’s language planning quarterly, ran an article titled “Let us hold fast to the purity of Pyongyang Cultured Language,” urging the eradication of ‘conspicuous elements’ that have recently found their way into the speech of Pyongyang denizens. The primary target of the article is women, for it goes on to complain that North Korean women using their cell phones on buses or in other public venues answer the phone with “yŏbosyo—,” “drawing up and out the ends of their utterances in an extremely bizarre fashion.” According to the article, “Deliberately flirtatious diction of this nature that is meant to appear desirable or cute in the eyes of others is a far cry from the elegant spiritual beauty and beautiful moral demeanor of Chosŏn women—soft on the outside, but tough on the inside.”

In order to contextualize this recent article and the questions it raises about language ideology, linguistic purism and gender politics in North Korea, I trace the history of North Korean official language planning discourse on linguistic politeness with specific reference to women’s speech, feminine virtue and questions of communist morality (*kongsanjuŭi todŏk*), and connect these to recent signs of linguistic Angst and besiegement in North Korean linguistic publications.