


that can cater to different communicative environments. For her case study on dating profiles, she employs reflective and ‘dialogic action interviews’ to not only explore the object of study (i.e. online dating profiles) but also dig into the social meanings of people, such as why online daters create the profiles they do. Thompson stresses that a reflexive approach provides researchers varying degrees of researcher intervention, especially when such intervention benefits the community.

Overall, the book provides rich perspectives on doing digital discourse analysis. Given the scope of this review, I can only highlight some aspects that I feel to be most significant. First, although researcher reflexivity is not an explicit theme in the volume, each chapter author has discussed or implied how their positionality, such as political stances, identities, social values and/or simply personal interests in social media, have shaped their research projects and decisions in choosing where to collect data, what to analyse, and how to analyse data. This aspect is important since it encourages novice researchers not to be afraid of telling their research stories. Second, the case studies, theories, practical guidelines, and suggestions presented in each chapter are engaging and answer many less discussed questions. Structuring the book with case studies, however, is both a strength and a weakness since these case studies have not fully represented digital practices particularly from the Global South, nor have they covered digital practices on other popular social media platforms, such as short-form video platform TikTok/Douyin and video sharing site Bilibili with danmu features (messages that are overlaid on the video). Moreover, English data appears to be the majority when in fact many netizens do not speak or use English on the internet. Nonetheless, I find the volume useful in providing helpful research directions and topics in new contexts, including researching multilingual and multimodal digital discourse, conducting cross-platform analysis, and doing digital ethnography.

(Received 2 May 2023)

Language in Society 53 (2024)
doi:10.1017/S0047404523000490

SONIA RYANG, *Language and truth in North Korea*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2021. Pp. 238. Hb. \$80.

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‘Thanks to the Great Leader’ is a ubiquitous utterance regularly repeated throughout North Korea. Reserved for Kim Il Sung, the recondite country’s revered founder, this official state-sanctioned sobriquet is recited in reference to any

positive feature of life; for example, it is ‘thanks to the Great Leader’ that factory production is high, a promotion is conferred, or the flowers are blooming. This exclusive epithet serves the dual function of expressing gratitude to Kim and simultaneously reinforcing North Korea’s version of truth, which posits him as the personification of the nation and representative of good governance. Ritualistic expressions like ‘thanks to the Great Leader’ are linguistic embodiments of North Koreans’ (presumed) loyalty and devotion to Kim, and by extension his dynastic communist regime, and its peculiar version of truth centered on Kim Il Sung.

In *Language and truth in North Korea*, social anthropologist Sonia Ryang scrutinizes this state-sanctioned speech to illuminate the intimate interconnections between language and truth in this secretive state. Drawing upon the state’s publications as primary data, an anthropological study of North Korean language and language usage is conducted. Linguistic practices instrumental to establishing and enforcing the regime’s version of truth are spotlighted. The focus, however, is not on language per se but instead on the processes by which language and truth are co-constitutive and enmeshed in North Korean society. Additionally, rather than interrogate whether North Koreans actually believe what they say or subscribe to this authorized truth, the book investigates how they contribute to sustaining this truth and, in so doing, submit themselves to it.

Concentrating on the Kim Il Sung era—commencing after the Korean War’s end in 1953 until his death in 1994—four processes involving linguistic institutionalization and formalized language usage, resulting in the creation and consolidation of North Korea’s version of truth, are identified. Corresponding to a rough chronological outline, these four processes involve the literary criticism purges of the 1950s and 1960s, vocabulary standardization projects during the 1960s through 1980s, the multivolume people’s chronicle about the Great Leader published from 1962 to the present day (spanning over one hundred volumes thus far), and the Great Leader’s seven-volume memoirs published in the 1990s. Common to these four processes and their texts ‘is a grand project: the making of a new nation with a new identity and a new language to tell the truth of this nation’ (179). Although heterogeneous in terms of purpose, genre, style, and authorship, Ryang compellingly conveys the ways in which these different texts contribute to constituting North Korea’s version of truth in which everyone and everything is connected to the Great Leader.

Specifically, a symbiosis exists between North Korean people and the Great Leader, or so this version of truth stipulates. Integrated into a united collective with Kim situated as ‘the source of all good and all power... [and] all achievements and all purposes of the North Korean nation reside in him’ (99), North Koreans emerge as selves and subjects through their positionalities within this collective and, significantly, their interconnectedness with Kim Il Sung. As the source of truth, Kim operates ‘as an entity that one should use in order to measure one’s own position’ (100). He is the main yardstick by which North Koreans adjudge their lives. Conditions validating this truth, moreover, are material improvements in quality of life. Construed as Kim’s benevolence, ‘concrete interventions to

improve material conditions... is thus indissolubly connected to good governance, which further reinforces the regime of truth of the North Korean state' (101). Unique here, Ryang elucidates, is that material improvements are registered as the Great Leader's enactments of love and care for the people that, in turn, substantiate the regime's proclaimed successes under his alleged eternal leadership.

Mandatory linguistic rules about and references to the Dear Leader, Ryang explains, perform and uphold this version of truth. Invoking Kim must be carried out 'in a formulaic manner according to a predetermined order and within a prearranged set and sequence of sentences, using vocabulary that is tightly coupled with the objects [the Kims] or concepts [North Korea's Juche Communist ideology] that it denotes, that statements of truth are made in North Korea' (17). These strict practices do more than censor and indoctrinate. A productive element is embedded within them permitting North Koreans to develop and refine skills in absorbing the ostentatious messages and monikers applied to Kim (and, since his death, his heirs Kim Jong Il, Kim Jong Un, and his sister Kim Yo-Jong, and wider family). Parts of the North Korean subject and North Korean way of life are produced by this language and its repetitive ritualistic recitation.

The Korean language employed in North Korea is itself equipped, as part of its fundamental structure, with required super-honorific formulas restricted solely for the Great Leader (and his family). Linguistic policies and mechanisms, like the standardization of vocabulary, people's chronicle, and Kim's memoirs, transformed the Korean language into a nativized, or indigenized, 'North Korean language of truth' that turned 'every speaker of this language into a national subject of North Korea' (54). North Koreans apply this language daily for both politico-ideological and utilitarian purposes. With and through it, they conduct their everyday lives whilst simultaneously glorifying the Great Leader and, thereby, helping to entrench this version of truth. The regime's Korean language, in other words, delivers 'the national truth while it also functions as a tool for daily communication' (96). Kim Il Sung is thus the inveterate leader of national linguistic life.

The inherent inconsistencies built into these various processes is, arguably, the book's most intriguing, even astonishing, revelation regarding North Korean linguistic practices and truth. First, the vocabulary standardization processes of the 1960s through 1980s resulted in the reduction of the language. Standardizing the language made the Korean spoken in North Korea lean and skinny. While it helped 'ensure the economy of ideological messaging' (96), the curtailment of words was not necessarily the intention. Second, the rigid rules for referencing the Great Leader usurped spontaneity from people's expressions concerning their feelings for him. In fact, 'the rule-bound formula of referencing, ironically, augments the ritual-like, performative effect of the [utterances], rather than working to instill spontaneous and authentic sentiments among the population' (96).

Perhaps the most surprising inconsistency presented and unpacked throughout the book is how the various linguistic processes advance a dichotomous image

of Kim Il Sung. The government's linguistic purges and vocabulary standardization processes, on the one hand, produced a god-like version and veneration of Kim; meanwhile, on the other hand, the people's chronicle and his own memoirs (admittedly vetted by state linguistic authorities) put forward a humble and human being. Distinct but related functions were fulfilled by these two dimensions to Kim. The officially approved adjectives and epithets exalt him as the core of the nation. The plain language used by ordinary North Koreans to describe their interactions with him in the chronicle, coupled with his own common and unadorned prose, reveal him as close to the people themselves and, hence, the heart of the nation. Taken together, both images—as North Korea's core and heart—work to create a North Korean truth of and about Kim Il Sung in relation to his centrality to both country and people.

Shaping North Koreans into subjects of and participants in this truth is one of the state's key objectives. These linguistic processes, in particular, ensure that North Koreans reproduce the state's dominant discourse through their discursive actions. By using the state's version of Korean and implementing its obligatory statements 'the speaking subject submits to power by upholding the truth that it projects' (8). Thus, the individual 'self in North Korea operates [through language] as part of North Korea's truth, thus becoming an important part of North Korean state apparatuses and state power' (188). North Korea's version of truth consequently arises and persists through the regime's linguistic processes and the citizens' ritual-like execution of formulaic language. Altogether, they co-constitute, maintain, and entrench the North Korean version of truth.

Ultimately, *Language and truth in North Korea* is an engrossing exploration of the linguistic construction of truth in the world's arguably most tenebrous countries. The idiosyncratic logic in the linguistic formation of North Korean truth is expertly traced through perspicacious inspections and sagacious interpretations. By shedding light on the ways in which North Korean language is deliberately designed, truth manufactured, and the fusion of the two through official linguistic processes, this book unravels some of the mystery surrounding the people's seemingly steadfast support for the regime and cult-like dedication to the Great Leader (and his family). Scholars and students of linguistics, political science, international relations, and history should find this book of value, especially insofar as its singular case study on North Korea is concerned. Readers interested in North Korea, whether in academic or amateur capacities, will also appreciate its enlightening examination of this otherwise abstruse place. Irreverently playing on North Korean language and truth, it is indeed 'thanks to the Great Leader' that this book's detailed insights have been furnished to the dear reader-comrades.

(Received 23 March 2023)